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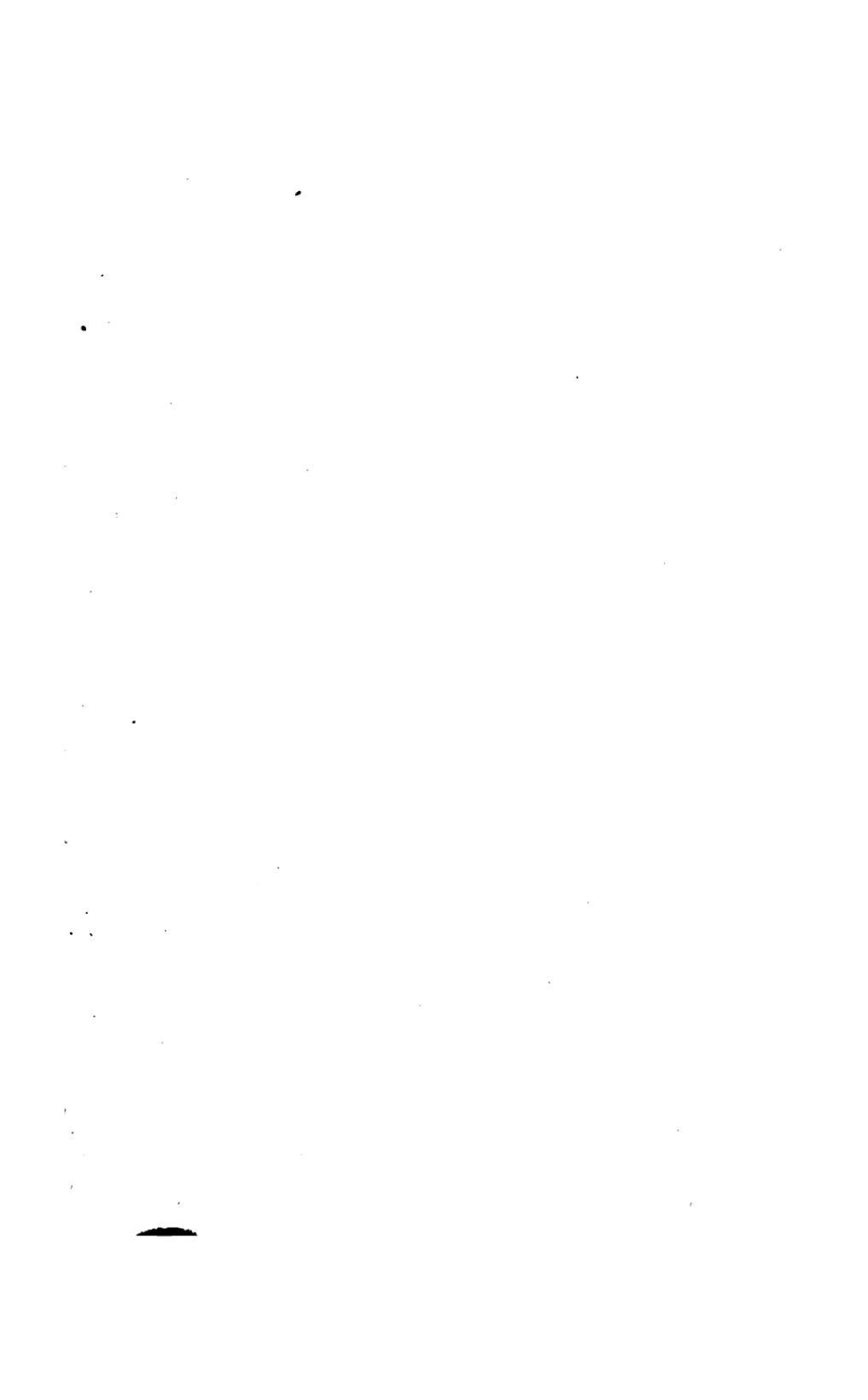


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**THE LITTLE GIRL WHO
COULDN'T-GET-OVER-IT**



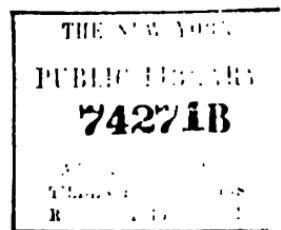
THE LITTLE GIRL WHO COULDN'T-GET-OVER-IT

By ALFRED SCOTT BARRY



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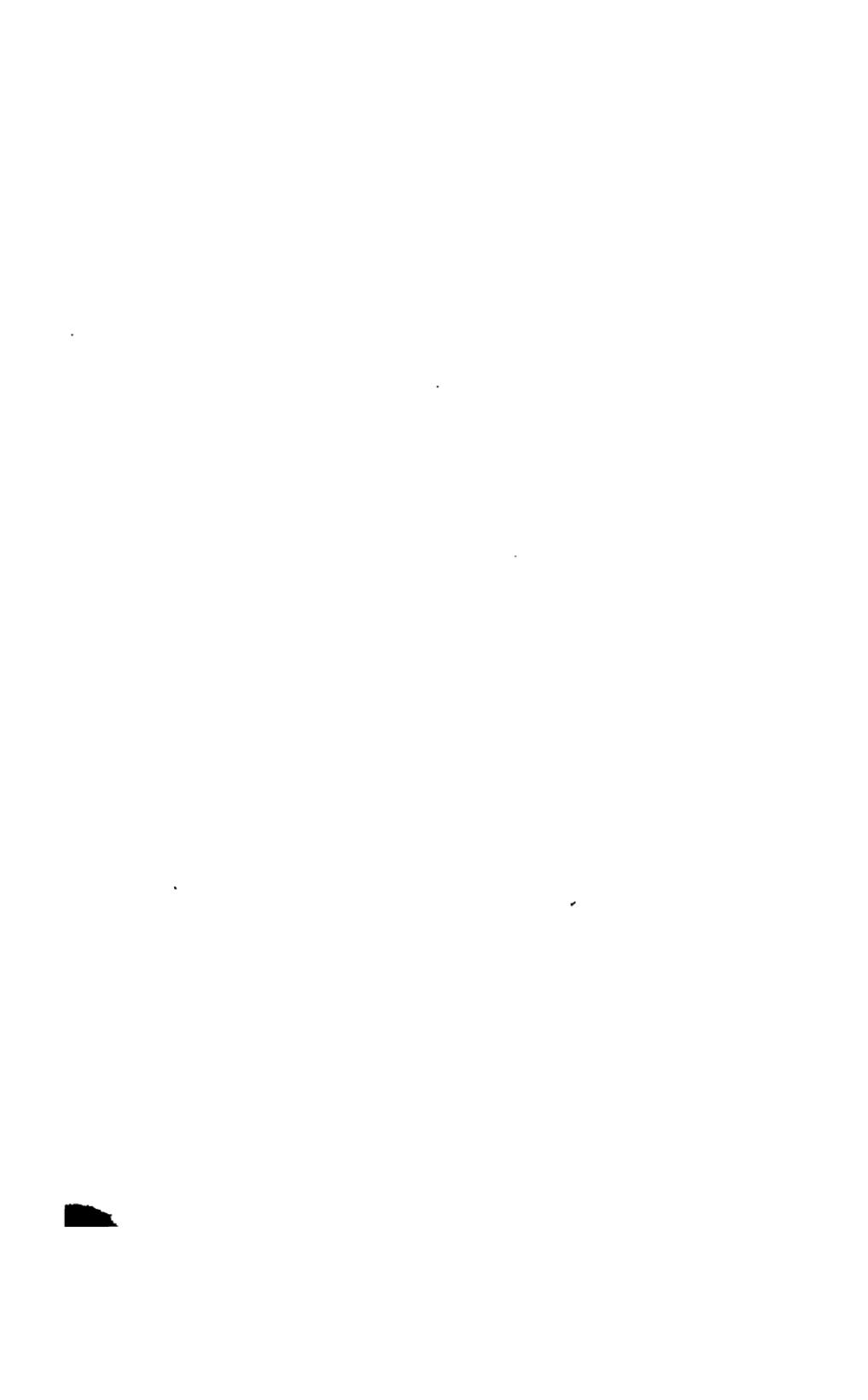
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**BECAUSE SO MANY PEOPLE HAVE
GOTTEN OVER IT, AND BECAUSE
SO MANY BEGIN TO THINK THEY
REALLY OUGHT TO, THIS IS
TO YOU
WHO NEVER QUITE COULD**



JUST beyond the blue rim of the world, which almost anybody can see by standing on tiptoe, the sharp lines of things, however beautiful, shade down to the point where you-can't-be-certain, and all the colors are softened by delicate veils of something that is not mist into an exquisite harmony. And, strange as this may seem, everything is much easier to see and understand, and tenfold more beautiful, on that account.

That country is the Kingdom of Nevercome, but it has another and a happier name, known only to a few and by them regarded as a very precious secret. If you are troubled by the fact that the border of this land seems to run away from you when you advance, you must know that there is a wicked old witch who guards it jealously. She travels around the blue rim of the world once every eye-wink, rendering herself invisible solely by the swiftness of her flight. Round and round she goes like a shuttle on an orbit. If you are at all imaginative, you may think sometimes that you see her flash by. But that is purely the work of imagination. She it is who pushes back the boundary of the Kingdom. She can only push it back a step at a time;

but as she is absolutely tireless, one could never walk fast enough nor far enough to catch up.

And this, you see, virtually makes the Prince of Nevercome a prisoner within his realm. For, without the magical soil of his Kingdom beneath his feet he can do nothing. In fact, apart from his Kingdom, he is nothing. . . .

All this, and much more, Otto told the Princes. But I am getting ahead of my story.

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I

FIRST of all, we must find out how there ever came to be such a person as the Princess, which certainly did not spring from any ordinary circumstance. You see, in the beginning there were two people who never should have been married. There may have been others, but about these two there can be no reasonable question.

It was in the days before New York had lost its last lingering traces of provincialism—before it had become the great roaring, cosmopolitan thing we know it now. George Gresham, a youthful English actor, came to America, guided in part by the spirit of adventure, but mainly with the thought of trying his fledgling talents among strangers. Aside from the fact of his being an orphan, fate had dealt tenderly with George Gresham up to that time. A

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maiden aunt had supplied him liberally with spending money, and he had lived the pleasant, sheltered life of an English schoolboy and Cantabrigian until, upon the sudden death of his aunt, and the surprising discovery that her fortune had dwindled to nothing, he found himself at twenty-two face to face with a burly, unshaven world, with a bare hundred pounds for defense.

Nature had endowed him richly for the practice of his profession. He was beautiful in person, and of exceedingly gentle voice and manner—brown-eyed, romantic; with the delicate complexion of a baby, and the quickly sensitive features of a young boy.

In a cheap actors' boarding-house, with starchy curtains, red plush furniture, faded carpets and a cross-eyed landlady, he met Lucille Godfrey—the shyest, frailest, most beautiful creature he had ever seen. There was a faery quality about her that suggested fluttering. One glimpsed her rather than saw her. One saw the light at play in her hair, but not the shape or color of the hair; caught glimpses of hazel-brown eyes forever dancing in shy laughter, in which the golden light lay as in pools, but could not describe them; was aware of continual flash and movement of planes of light in her brown silk dress, but could not tell the cut of it. To know that there were two such people in the world, and that they were aware of one another's existence, was to know

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that they must marry. But to know that, was to know how bitter the inevitable outcome must be.

For him the way to fame seemed but a short step, but in reality it was a longer and more difficult journey than he could have guessed. He failed badly in his first crude essays; and every part in which he failed, quite apart from the mortification of it, made it harder for him to get another. Like him, Lucille was alone in the world. She had come to New York with the remainder of a tiny patrimony, to sing in concerts for lyceums. With a voice as beautiful, as delicate, as fragile as herself, she had won the hearts of managers; but the public was unresponsive. Hers was an elemental talent, fitted for an Ariel, to fill the upper reaches of sunlight with dripping song, to rob a poet of body and sense and carry him beyond the seven seas, but too refined, too delicate, to charm the dull ear of tradesmen and loiterers. It is perhaps needless to explain that when their fortunes were at the lowest ebb and nothing was left but the happiness in their hearts and the laughter in their eyes, these two were married in the chantry of a little Episcopal church in a side street.

There were days of good fortune, but there were months of ill. And this is how they came to hire Mrs. Kernochan's front bedroom, in the old-fashioned two-story and basement brick house opposite the oh-so-tiny park with its high iron palings,

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and its dusty grass and withered shrubbery. The rent was low, the surroundings humble if not squalid; but there was an old-world grace of daintiness about the Colonial doorway of the old house, with its pretty side-lights and spandrel, and a beautiful red in the faded bricks which distinguished it from the complacent coarseness of its neighbors east and west,—a something which, with the high, sweet morning sun over the little green space of the park, compensated these two for that more beautiful world to which they evidently belonged, and which they had somehow lost.

Here things went from bad to worse. Their last penny disappeared. She sought engagements and managers promised as generously as before, but there was no blinking the fact that she was an utter failure before the public. The theatrical season closed and months of idleness stared him in the face. They were in need of food, and there was no money to buy food with. Even if there had been food a-plenty, housekeeping in a bedroom is desperate, and cooking over a small cylinder stove all but impossible. They were surprised, then pained, then frightened. When it seemed that things could not be worse, in the dusk of a summer evening, while they sat without a light, she whispered to him the sweetest, most terrible secret in the world, and he strained the frail, lovely creature to his heart, closer,

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warmer, as he felt her frightened tears streaming warm on his hand.

Those were days of desperation. He borrowed from friends, from acquaintances, from almost strangers. In a dripping, beery barroom he sang for his dinner, and the greasy teamsters applauded and laid money on the bar. He gathered it up with the greatest surprise and shame, and fled. He sought employment at any sort of work, but a financial panic was over the land and the city was full of idle men. At last an English merchant, seeing his threadbare tweeds, took pity on him and gave him a porter's place.

Immediately the sky seemed to brighten; but their fears had scarcely disappeared when, one day, as he was working with a lurching, drunken teamster, loading a dray, an enormous packing-case toppled from the tail of the wagon and crushed him on the stone pavement. He closed his eyes and faded as a flower fades. It was days before he could speak, before he knew. And she was leaning over him. He was in bed at home. The doctor had said that he was injured internally—how badly he could not know.

Weeks passed away, months. He could not gather himself, could not rally. It was excruciating to move. Slowly his frame contracted and his face withered. His cheeks were pallid now, and his hands blue and thin. He slept a great deal, or

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seemed to sleep, and when his eyes were closed she indulged the exquisite misery of tears,—for him, and for herself. If it had not been for charitable women who brought food and medicines, they would have perished utterly.

He died a week before her baby was born. But she did not see him laid away. She did not know. The delicate mind had snapped like an overstrained fiddle-string.

II

THE Lord have mercy upon us! What are we going to do now?" asked Mrs. Kernochan. She was not a sentimental person, nor was her countenance expressive. Her strong frame, bony and tall, seemed all lumps, a product of hard knocks. Her immobile features betrayed very little feeling, and that of a tough, ironic sort.

Before her in a hard wooden chair by the kitchen window sat old Mrs. Dowd, whose eyes could scarce be seen for the folds and collops of smoky yellow flesh on her widowed face. A very dumpy black figure was Mrs. Dowd, as short and fat as her name, and there was nothing whatever to be seen in her features but the thin movement of her lips as she said:

"She'll have to go away."

"Of course she will," Mrs. Kernochan assented. "But what's to become of the baby?" Of the abstract question of an abstract baby whose mother had gone daft, Mrs. Kernochan would have made short work. But this was not an abstract baby. It lay on the kitchen table, in a market basket, bedded in a red flannel shirt, and protested violently. Mrs.

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Kernochan, arms akimbo, looked down upon it more in consternation than pity. It was very tiny, very dark-red, very much wrinkled, and the passionate protest of its small face added to its wrinkled homeliness. There was a lot of blackest hair sticking wetly to its red little head, and its two fists, bitterly clenched, and its equally pugilistic-looking feet beat time vigorously to the unremitting "wahs" that proceeded from the dark cavern of its shapeless little mouth.

Mrs. Dowd did not dare say "Foundling Asylum," though it was what she thought. Mrs. Kernochan was a mother.

"They'll take it from ye," said Mrs. Dowd, meaning the authorities.

"Will they, then?" Mrs. Kernochan flared up suddenly.

"Well, then, you'd best get it something to eat," Mrs. Dowd said, after a sententious pause. "Its mother'll never feed it."

"I'd be afraid she'd kill it," Mrs. Kernochan went on, "though she's not wild, only stupid and limpsy-like. But if she don't have it to suck, she'll be sick unto death and maybe die."

"Leave that to the doctor," Mrs. Dowd muttered.

There was a long pause, and Mrs. Kernochan went on the other foot.

"Jim will be crazy when I tell him I'm goin' to keep it. Times is that hard, and money tight."

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"Sure, it won't eat much, nor require much room at this present," Mrs. Dowd responded. "And maybe, anyway, it won't be with you long."

That cemented Mrs. Kernochan's resolution. "It will eat something, though," she said, "and every little counts. And it will eat more every day it lives. And its mother'll maybe never come back."

Mrs. Dowd looked out of the area window at the cellar steps, and the rough board fence that enclosed a hand's breadth of bare yard.

"Well, I'll pay for it, then," she said. "Old sinner that I am, I might do something for the good of my soul."

"And not a shift to put it in," said Mrs. Kernochan. "Bridget wore hers all out and I threw them away."

Mrs. Dowd sat unmoved for some moments. Then she drew a fat forefinger along her tight lips and remarked:

"I might take a little walk after dinner and buy her some. If you'll name her Marg'ret, for Saint Margaret, I'll buy her a christening dress."

Thus it was settled that the baby should live in the old brick house opposite the little park, and grow up and play in the gutters with small Irish urchins, and tow-headed Slavs and Teutons, and black-eyed children from sunny Italy,—herself the strangest little wastrel that ever was born to a tene-

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ment house and a dirty street, or ever came out of the blue to offend and irritate a stodgy earth.

And she did live.

Robbed of mother's milk and mother-love at the outset, and so tiny and slender of mold, the outlook was not promising. Blue milk from the corner grocery was her food, and cracker-crumbs. But she somehow made her way. Nor was she ill,—but so wee! And Mrs. Kernochan gave her the same care that she had given her own,—a kind of fatalistic and despairing attention, as though it were but a short way from the cradle to the tomb, and hardly worth going. In the cheap and not too tidy clothing which Mrs. Kernochan at best could ill afford, she was an odd, pathetic little figure beside Bridget and Tim, her seniors, and baby Mat, who came afterward. They all seemed so much more substantial, so much more worth while, by comparison!

As for the lady in the parlor, she lay very ill for a long time, and the doctor came and went, and the curtains were always down, and charity-ladies came from time to time bringing provisions and medicines, and glancing at the pale figure that lay so low.

Then the bodily illness removed, and the patient grew well enough to sit up. But her mouth hung open, and her beautiful eyes were so empty and staring, and her pale fingers sought the braids of lustrous brown hair behind her shoulders and fin-

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gered them in a way to make the blood chill in one's veins. If some one spoke to her, she looked about surprised, and repeated what they said, but without gathering anything from it.

When she was well enough to be moved, Mrs. Kernochan went to her in her room one morning and dressed her. Then she got out her jacket and hat and held them for her.

"Come, dearie," she said, "you are going out to-day. Yes;—two gentlemen are coming to take you riding in a cab."

"Two gentlemen?" quavered the sweet voice. But she got no hint of the sinister meaning of the phrase.

Two gentlemen did appear, meaning two orderlies from the insane hospital, and she placed one pale hand in the hand of one of them, and the other on the other's arm, and went down the narrow stairs of the old house with them, her mouth hanging open, her eyes unseeing, never murmuring, never guessing.

III

TIME, without the help of custom, adopted the strange little wisp of humanity into the Kernochan family. The authorities had been satisfied to leave her where they found her. But even Time could not make her one of them.

"What a queer bit it is!" said Mrs. Dowd, sitting in her familiar chair by the kitchen window. The old lady, through her pudgy eye-slits, cast occasional glances at the infant Margaret, now two years old, playing on the floor at her feet. Though there was no outward sign to reveal it, one might guess that she found a good deal of amusement in the child. "See the homely little mouth, all pursed up small-like, and her lips so dark red, like a—, like a—, like one of them red rosebuds, or some such a thing, and its little weeny chin stickin' out so sharp below, no bigger than the flat o' me thumb, and its little black eyes a-sparklin' and a-lookin'. Sure, if I'd see it on a dark night under a hawthorn bush, I'd think it was a fairy."

"Its eyes ain't black," Mrs. Kernochan protested argumentatively. "If you'd see it in the sunlight

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sometimes you'd think there was gold in them a-most. And it can't help the size of its chin, of course, seein' what it come from. If it didn't have them sheeny curls, now——"

"Ah, sure—maybe it'll grow lighter as it gets older. 'Tis like a little Guinea now. But it may be a blonde yet, who knows?"

"Any one can easy see you never had childer," Mrs. Kernochan remarked with a sour deference. "'Tis the dress makes her look so funny. But I'd just that wan little bit of mulberry-colored calico, and no time to make it nice."

"It fits her like the sign-boards does the sandwich-men on the avenue," Mrs. Dowd said, with a grim air of definition.

"If I had a pretty dress for her, and time to wash her, I could make a real pretty baby of her," Mrs. Kernochan persisted. "I'd curl her hair."

"She'd look more like a sheeny than ever," Mrs. Dowd said, ignoring utterly the reference to a new dress.

Mrs. Dowd had been a laconic and left-handed fairy godmother to the child ever since its birth. Indeed, her whole life was surreptitious. She owned the old house, and another not unlike it in a neighboring street, both bought with the earnings of a saloon her husband had conducted before his untimely death. The revenue from these kept her in very simple comfort and idleness—an idleness in

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which she spent many hours in the kitchen chair, with occasional remarks to Mrs. Kernochan, or in another, hardly less uncomfortable, by the back parlor window on the floor above, which was her bedroom and living-room—always looking out on the tiny grassless yard, and its rough-board fence, and the line-strung backs of abutting houses, and apparently quite content. Her niece-by-marriage, Mrs. Kernochan, was her agent in renting the rooms, none of the roomers knowing of her ownership, for which service Kernochan and his wife had the basement at a low rent. Mrs. Dowd had continued without a murmur and rather liberally, to underwrite the expenses of the infant Margaret.

She was much interested in the child's first attempts at talk.

"Ba-ba-a," she would say, looking down into the earnest little face at her knee, and trying hard to make eyes at her, while the child rested small brown hands on her black dress. "Lord, would you look at her now—sure you'd think she was tryin' to preach me a sermon, and 'ba-ba' is all the sum of it. And shakin' her head, as much as to say: 'Can't yez understand?' Sure, and there is gold in her eyes,—like a hoppy-toad's."

Another year added much to the little orphan. She left behind her pudgy babyhood, climbed the area steps and joined the other children in their joyous possession of the smelly pavements and the

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darkly odorous gutters. Her hair grew longer and lightened a wee, but it was too unkempt for any one to guess that it was pretty. She was slight, with little olive-brown arms, and pipe-stem legs, and a delicate little oval of a questioning face; but the mold of gentleness was in every line. She did not play as the other children did; she spent a good deal of time in a wistful kind of onlooking. But when she spoke her voice was like tinkling silver bells, and full of sweet inflections, like the play of light on a dancing brooklet.

“ ‘Have ‘oo seed Bridget’s nigger-dolly, Dra’ma?’ ” said Mrs. Dowd, making a grotesque attempt at mimicry of the little silver voice. Then she wiped her thin lips with her yellow forefinger, and falling into silence, resumed her scrutiny of the rough-board fence.

IV

IT must have been when the Princess was four years old that she began to show unmistakable signs of that singularity which followed her through life, bringing with it so much pain, both for herself and for those others whose sympathetic natures enabled them to divine, or at least to imagine, what her trouble was. She was not the Princess then, at least not consciously such, and she had not even heard her own real name. Mrs. Dowd called her Ma-aggy, with two very flat, bleating *o's* for the vowel, and as Ma-aggy she began to find a place in the world.

What Mrs. Dowd called her *is* important, for in a manner it is typical of all that happened to the Princess as she went on her devious way through the world. Her real name being Margarita, as Otto (we shall see) established beyond a doubt, she was christened by chance Margaret, and custom fastened on her the name, or rather designation, of Maggie. Associations altered this to Ma-aggy. Many will think this is mere hair-splitting, but there are those who know; Margarita and Margaret are not at all

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alike. Margarita is swift, dancing, light of foot, with the vari-colored gleam of precious stones; Margaret, on the other hand, is bovine and slow, and of an even, dark coloration. Margaret should weigh not less than 170, should be big-boned and a pronounced brunette, of very placid disposition. This calling any sort of person by any kind of name that happens to roll well off the tongue, won't do. Maggie, properly speaking, is not a name at all. Maggie may be blonde, brunette, or mixed; tall, short, bony or plump; sweet-tempered, even or bad. All we know about Maggie is that she works very hard, and is on the whole a good kind of girl. But her name means no more than *746*, which may equally well designate a prisoner in a cell-block, or a conductor on a trolley. As for Ma-aggie, it is the utter and last desecration of a human soul.

"Dra'ma's dot pitty eyes," said the Princess, seated on Mrs. Dowd's knee, where she sometimes clambered, and was not always put off.

Mrs. Dowd straightened up electrically.

"Out upon you, little liar!" she ejaculated. But, though her manner was fierce, she offered the child no violence. After a moment she added, inwardly mollified: "So you thought you could flatter the old woman, did ye, ye minx! Shure, it's deep you are. But then," she finished grimly, "ye'll need to be deep to live in this durrty old world."

It is much to be doubted that Mrs. Dowd was

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really angry. After all, she *was* a woman, and somewhere in the depths of her lingered the capacity to believe herself in some slight degree attractive. The child, of course, had chosen an absurd epithet, but who, looking into her intensely sincere eyes, could not believe that she had sensed a trace of lingering sweetness at the core of the heavy old soul whose face she had been scanning?

"Ye'll get down now, and run and play," said the old woman dryly. "Where's the two purty spools on a string I brang you yesterday?"

A little later she remarked to Mrs. Kernochan, *sotto voce*, and with a nod at the weeling at play in a corner: "What do you think she's after tellin' me? Shure, she says 'Drammer's got purty eyes.' "

"She's certainly kissed the Blarney-stone," said Mrs. Kernochan, with a withering look; "though when or where I can't say."

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Dowd, with almost a sigh of self-betrayal, "I might have been purty once."

"You might have been," said Mrs. Kernochan, "only what happened you."

Persons who thought, though, that Mrs. Dowd was wholly lacking in perception of the child's nature, would be failing to credit her Irish wit—a terrier-like kind of intelligence which, if it could not tell *what* a thing was, could at least tell *that* it was, and failing to recognize the difference between a rat and an elephant, at least knew that there was a dif-

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ference. No doubt it was a little blue flash of this sort of thing in her narrow eyes that made the child call her pretty. What we all love supremely is understanding—understanding and affection being pretty nearly the same thing.

The two pretty spools were found and instantly they became a chariot, a very wonderful carriage. Obviously there were horses, and that they were beautiful and full of life may be gathered from the fact that they "shined all over." The gentleman in the carriage (mind you) was "very nice" and is it any wonder that the lady looked pretty, since the gentleman was "awful kind to her." When the spools lay at rest on the bare kitchen floor, there was still great danger, since the horses "jumped and jumped," and when the inevitable happened, and the pretty lady was thrown to the pavement, it was the Princess who caught her up in her arms, and told her "not to cry."

"Drat the child!" said Mrs. Kernochan, "always under my feet, and me hurryin' to get up my man's lunch for Timmy to take to the power-house. Take your traps and get out of this. Go and find Bridget, and tell her I want her to go to the store and get me a ten-cent can of condensed milk. Go on; out with you! What kind of a child will you be—always playing in a dark corner instead of getting outdoors in the fresh air."

As the door closed on the wee figure, dragging

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two spools disconsolately, Mrs. Dowd remarked: " 'Tis the strangest child ye ever did see. She'll sit in the dark passage-way and talk to herself, and you'd think she had a whole city-full around her, and all talkin' to her and she to them. And I really believe she thinks they're all there. She looks as if she didn't know no better."

"Oh, there's something wrong with her, all right," Mrs. Kernochan assented gloomily. "But I'll take it out of her some day. You see if I don't!"

If you are to understand the Princess and her afflictions, however, you must know something also of the hard honor and plain decency of the world in which her delicate drama was staged. If Mrs. Kernochan, for instance, seemed difficult at times, it was but the stony edge of one of her many virtues. She was the backbone—unadorned, it is true—of the establishment. There were no subtle curves, no softly rounded outlines, no languorous veil of flesh, about Angelina Kernochan; no graceful nothings, no blandishments, and no deceit. By grace of her bony excellence, Jim Kernochan lounged down to the power-house every morning before seven, and if shoveling coal seemed heavy work, it was Angie's spine that kept him at it. It was the pail of beer that Angie never failed to place on the supper-table that kept him out of the saloon where the other men from the boiler-room freshened up after the day's

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work. Angie even furnished the grouch that kept him apart from the good-natured group of his fellow-toilers, and saw to it that the blue paper of shag tobacco on the mantel-shelf was never empty. And it was no idle task to steer the rudderless Jim by absent treatment.

In her rising, she prevented the dawn. Rolling out of bed with a pale, bewildered face, and an "Oh, my God!" she would snatch up her little ebony rosary, dull with use, and falling on her knees at the foot of the bed, her lips would frame a rapid sibilant, and the black beads would fairly fly through her long fingers. It was but the beginning of the day's work, but it was performed with speed and accuracy, and to the uttermost "Amen." Nor was any day so long, but she muttered her last "Hail, Mary" and kissed the crucifix that hung above her bed.

If, through the moving skein of iron business that filled her days, she caught hurried glimpses of large duties looming ahead, it is not to be wondered at that she adopted heroic measures for their treatment. She meant for Bridget better things than the box-factory that had imprisoned her own girlhood, and for Tim and little Matty she meant that they should go straight and "not be bums" if any power of devotion on her part could bring the thing to pass.

"Kernochan," she said to her spouse one evening

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after the clatter of children's noise had died away, "you gotta take care of that young son o' yours. I tried to lick him to-day, and I near broke my hand on him; but what good did it do? I can't do it no more. I ain't got the stren'th."

Big Jim, who had the manners and a good deal the appearance of a woodchuck, was taken aback. On the one hand he beheld a distasteful vision of his own two hundred pounds laying onto the back of a nine-year-old boy, which seemed to him ludicrously disproportionate. It was an effeminate and humiliating task, plainly woman's work, to inflict whatever punishment might be necessary until it came to the possibility of stand-up fights,—when a man might care to intervene. On the other hand, when Angie addressed him by his patronymic, it was a pretty sure sign that her mind was fixed. One could go over, or under, or around, but not *through*.

"There's no sense in licking a boy after he gets that old," said Kernochan; "what he's goin' to be he will be by that time" (whatever that might mean).

"He will, will he?" Angie retorted hotly. "Then you might as well go and get the Black Maria tomorrow morning, for that's what he's going to be unless somebody stops him. He's a thief,—that's what he is,—a common, low-down, dirty thief!"

"Stop that, now," said Kernochan, drying up

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some of his wife's excessive emotional vitality.
"You've no call to say that."

"What would I say, then, when he comes home and tells me that he's lost one cent, and two cents,—and here the other day five cents? Don't I remember how big a cent was when I was a kid—and him tryin' to make me think that he goes around losin' them like that? And now, of course, it's cigarettes! I just happened to go to the sink for my dishpan to-day when he was washin' his face at the tap, and I got a whift of his breath. That's the way they all go."

Even Kernochan had to bow before the rough justice of her strictures. She had been the making of him, and he knew that she was wise.

"Ah,—sure, you can't lick a boy like that with your hand. What you want is a barrel-slat." Then suddenly there came into his mind from some dark corner, a saving memory of an implement of torture that belonged in the category with the rack and the iron-maiden, and the thumb-screw, an implement nicely adapted to lengthen a woman's arm, and also to shelve the present problem, which was growing distressfully personal to him. "I'll stop in the second-hand machine-shop to-morrow and get you a len'th or two of round belting. Cut that into pieces about as long as a chair-leg, and tie nine o' them together and you've got a cat-o'-nine-tails. Just the sight of one o' them things hangin' on the back of

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the door'll do more good than twenty lickin's. My father had one when I was a boy."

Mrs. Kernochan sniffed. Nevertheless, there was something about the idea that appealed to her efficient fingers, and when Kernochan brought the thing home at night, wrapped in a bit of German newspaper, she lifted it before the wondering ring of youthful faces with a flush of triumph and a prideful glitter in her eye.

"It'll hang here just inside the closet-door," she said, pointing to a small brass hook.

"It's dot a nice little 'tring to hang it up by," said Baby Matt, deeply moved by the perfection of its workmanship.

"And mind you, now," Mrs. Kernochan expanded, as she thrilled to the pliant power of the thing in her hand, "the first one of you that gets my Irish up is goin' to feel it."

There was real eloquence in her remarks, and her audience showed a profound interest—even the Princess, who stood at one end of the admiring group, dangling a rimracked doll by the leg, directly under Mrs. Kernochan's glare. Her hair was blackly stringy as an Indian's, her olive skin had paled a little under the apprehension of the new and terrible engine; upon the little oval of her face, which was streaky with dirt, sat an expression of the most profound concern, and her eyes protruded,

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nearly twice their normal size and dark with wonderment.

"Yes, and you, too," Mrs. Kernochan went on, intoxicated with the sense of unquestioned power. "If I catch you telling any more of your lies to Bridget, I'm goin' to give you a good smart taste of it!"

Little as she was, and having no sort of idea what Mrs. Kernochan meant by "her lies," she knew that there was a refuge in silence, and more and more she strove to cage the little faery voice within her, for all her speech was strange to Mrs. Kernochan.

V

SHUTTING up one's whole self, however, is a quite different thing from locking in the closet (for the time being) some one faculty that may have been guilty of a more or less shameless luxuriance. Such a faculty, convicted of producing purely decorative effects, can be promptly and efficaciously subdued. But when there is not a fiber in one's whole being that has a proper regard for things-as-we-find-them; when there is not a thought in one's mind that quite corresponds with observed phenomena, it is plain that there will be fresh and ever-recurring violations of that sense of truth upon which a too-consistent world shapes its rather stuffy ways.

The cat-o'-nine-tails quickly won a place in Mrs. Kernochan's affection. It was "the handiest little thing!" she told her aunt. And the lust of power kindled in her eye as she touched it. It saved her hand. But that was not all. *It did the work.* In the case of young Timothy, she had long felt the inability of the feminine nature to accomplish real violence. There was a feeling that Tim was quite

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capable of sneering at the whole ceremony within a very few minutes of its completion. She knew that a mocking grin and other humiliating comments probably found vent the minute he had vanished behind the hallway door. Denying him the privilege of returning to his companions in the street only delayed his revenge. She wanted something that would make him *wish* to remain indoors afterwards, and now at last she had found it. The first *rencontre* so effectually penetrated the tough sensibilities of that young gentleman that he was unwilling his friends and compeers should gaze upon his marred and swollen visage that same day (not that she applied it there, of course). And after that it was only necessary for Mrs. Kernochan to grasp him firmly by the collar with one hand, while she brandished the unholy weapon with the other, to set him wriggling like an eel, and with such a pallor of remorse on his stricken features that it would have been a waste of time to carry the operation out in detail.

Timothy Kernochan grew tall for his eight years. There was nothing but Irish in his veins, and his features were so excessively plain that one might have thought there was nothing in them at all until the street put a knowing twinkle into his eye, and a certain coarse smartness into his speech. When he was happy he was quarrelsome, and when he was unhappy he was sullen. Bridget, two years younger,

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was a pasty-faced child with flaxy hair, very straight. She was fat, indolent and uncommunicative, and her bluish eyes held an impudent stare.

"She takes after *him*," said Angie, who didn't altogether like the child.

Baby Mat was pudgy, curly-haired, good-natured.

In time Bridget ran afoul of the cat-o'-nine-tails. She had taken a notion, so her mother averred, that it was not nice to go for beer.

"Let Ma-aggie do it," she remonstrated. "There's littler ones than her goes with the pail."

Her protests failing to bring the desired relief, Bridget took to absenting herself at critical moments, with the result that the Princess was more than once led to the edge of the areaway by Mrs. Kernochan, who pressed her tiny fingers shut on seven sordid cents, threw a meager bit of a shawl about her shoulders, and, with many cautions about losing the money, sped her along the darkling pavement toward the glare of the corner saloon.

"She's so little, though," she confided to Mrs. Dowd, "I'm always afraid she'll spill the beer, or lose the money, or something."

The evening the Princess actually did spill the beer, and broke a twenty-cent pitcher and cut her chin into the bargain, Miss Bridget was unlucky enough to arrive before the Princess's tears had been dried, and then in a very brief space she received enough correcting to last her an almost un-

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believable time. There were insensible ends to her nerves, however, and it is doubtful if she suffered any real injury. The full magic of the cat-o'-nine-tails lay hidden in its tough fascicles, only to be evoked at a somewhat later date.

From the hour of that castigation, however, dated the desire on the part of the Princess to comfort and succor Bridget. With big, helpless eyes she had witnessed that shameful thing—the subjugation and debasement of a human soul, and her delicate flesh quivered with futile and silent sympathy. Thenceforward she was groping toward the other little girl, so far removed from her by nature and temperament, with such healing and kindness as her small hands could bring.

"Bridget, tum here, and I will tell you a 'tory.' This was her formula, and though the "'tory" had singularly little appeal to the phlegmatic Bridget, often giving rise to scorn instead of affording the entertainment it was meant to convey, it did not always fail of an auditory. Not infrequently the "'tory" found its way to the incredulous ears of Angelina Kernochan, and that is how she came to hear about the Gray Lady.

VI

YOU see," said the Princess (this story, by the way, broke on a rainy morning when Bridget and the narrator sat on the top step of the areaway with a tattered umbrella spread above them and a newspaper beneath, and a hadden drizzle shrouding all their damp little world), "this Gray Lady was awful pretty. And she was awful good, too. And I guess that's why she had so much trouble, Bridget. 'Cause the little bad man never laughed till he saw her cry. But she didn't cry,—oh, no. It was worse than that. She only looked like cryin'. Only once in a while she cried.

"And she loved her little boy. He was a nice little boy, and pretty" (would the Princess ever quit her eternal prettifying!). "And he hanged onto his mamma's dress, and digged his hands in where it was all soft and gray, and didn't want to look at anybody. Only she said he must.

"And the little bad man came into the room where she was. And he went right up to the little boy, to take him away. Anybody could see how nasty he

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was. 'Cause he had black whiskers, and you couldn't see his skin. And he had great big glasses, and you couldn't see his eyes,—only jest *snap, snap!* like that. And wherever he went it was dark, so you could only see his hair sticking up, all bad—awful bad. And he walked as if he didn't have any legs, only *quick! quick!* and his fingers sticked out in front."

Bridget turned an incredulous stare upon the Princess, but that young person was so engrossed in the facts she was reciting as to ignore utterly mere questions of opinion. She wore the rapt, uplifted look of the ecstatic.

"And she wouldn't let her little boy go to him. I thought she was going to scream, but she didn't. Only she held tight fast.

"But the little man just held out his long fingers to him, and the little boy loved him, and pulled away from her, and ran to the little bad man."

"How high was he?" asked Bridget dully.

The Princess indicated a ridiculous height—perhaps sixteen inches, which was no doubt due to optical error.

"Huh! I wouldn't be afraid of him. I'd kick him."

"But," argued the Princess earnestly, "you wouldn't if you loved him. And that was just the trouble. The little boy *loved* him. He thought he was nice.

"Then," she went on, "right away the little bad

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man runned away with the little boy around his neck loving him!

"And the Gray Lady tried to make her mouth open, but it wouldn't. Only her eyes sticked out. And she tried to walk, but she couldn't. And she could only fall down on her knees and cry, and hold her hands out for him to come back. But he didn't come. He went away with the little bad man, and he loved him. And the little bad man laughed 'cause the lady was cryin'."

Whether there was an hiatus in the tale at this point, or whether she was merely transfixed by the tragical truth of the tale, the Princess leaned upon her hand a moment, lost in contemplation. From which state she was startled by a contemptuous "G'wan!"

Evidently mistaking the tenor of the remark, she proceeded:

"All the poor lady could do was cry and cry. So she cried all night. I was awful sorry for her, and I couldn't sleep. When it was morning, she said her prayers, and then she didn't cry any more.

"And the little boy looked at the little bad man and saw how nasty he was, and he runned away from him.

"And he runned and he runned. And the little bad man runned, too, right behind him. And all the people didn't see them running. But the little boy runned right past all the people till he got home.

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But the little bad man couldn't get him any more, 'cause the little boy hanged on to his mother's dress, and he loved her, and he didn't love the little bad man any more."

Here another hiatus, broken only by a supercilious sniff, and "Is that all?"

"Yes," said the Princess, "only the little boy was awful sick afterward, 'cause the little bad man did something to him, and I don't know if he's well yet, or not."

A period was put to the narrative by the sudden arrival of Tim Kernochan, who burst into the area-way from the street, and in sheer good humor pushed the doughlike Bridget in a sprawling heap on top of her small companion, from which humiliating position the story-teller extricated herself not without bruises and scratches and an odd consternation.

THAT society can and does exercise a jealous preceptorial oversight of the mental processes of its entertainers, so small an adventurer in romance could scarcely know. The stream of her fate flowed darkly underground until in mid-afternoon she found herself suddenly confronted by a lowering and doomful foster-mother, who towered above her, gaunt, shadowy and portentous, against the ceiling.

"So you're the young one that knows all about the Gray Lady?" came a tensely strange voice.

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"Yes'm."

Angelina Kernochan sidled toward the pantry-door, taking care not to release her quarry from the glare with which she had fixed her. Still moving with that strange fatefulness, she reached up and grasped the cat-o'-nine-tails.

"What have I told you about lying?"

"You said it was awful bad." The little olive hands clasped one another anxiously, but, though there was appeal in the mildly widened brown eyes, there was never a trace of whining or flinching.

"Don't you know what a wicked thing it is to be frightening Bridget with your tales of black men, and the like? Don't you know that you'll be thrown into hell-fire, to burn, and burn, but never be burned up, and no one could ever get you out, or so much as bring you a little cold water to drink?"

In the pause of the irate, clinking words, the flat voice of Mrs. Dowd, sitting shadowlike in a corner, stirred the atmosphere pleadingly.

"Ah-h, let her alone, Angie. Sure, 'tis nothing but a childish trick. She'll get over it."

"Will you mind your own business, then?" Mrs. Kernochan flung over her shoulder. "Am I to sit still and see the child damned body and soul before my eyes?"

"Oh, well; I'll be going along out of it, then." Mrs. Dowd upheaved laboriously and made her slow way from the room. "There's a devil in you,

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Angie, when your temper's up," she remarked as she passed through the door, "and I'll have nothing to do with it."

"Devil or no devil," Mrs. Kernochan mumbled, "I'll do my duty, and I'd like to see the one can turn me from it. Don't you know," she continued, shaking the straps at the little girl, while a fleck of foam whitened in her mouth corner, "that you'll burn forever and ever for telling lies?"

"I didn't tell no lies," said the Princess, eyes mystified and wondering. "I saw the black man myself."

"WHAT!" The word was scorching, red and terrible. "Where did you see the black man?"

"In the house," the Princess asseverated, with such utter honesty of mien as only perfect innocence could compass. "Right in the house, where the Gray Lady was sitting, and the little boy sticked his head in her dress."

"What house?"—and the woman leered as she stooped to her prey.

For the first time in her life the child's eyes wavered, lost. Never before had she had occasion to note just where the world of her visioning met and matched with the actual world about her. Never before had she had occasion to doubt that it did. Now she was suddenly bewildered. Something had forsaken her, but neither her courage nor her honesty.

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"Was it this house?" the woman stormed.

For a moment the child floundered hopelessly in her mind. Baby talk, oddly enough, came to her lips.

"'Es, mamma. I fink it was upstairs in Mis' Breen's." And even as she spoke she realized that Miss Breen's first-floor parlor was *not* the scene of the tragic-comedy, and that she did not know where it was.

"That's enough," shrieked Angelina Kernochan, suddenly released like a tense spring, "that's all I want! Go in that room!"

SEVEN-FIFTEEN, by the clock.

"You've done it now," said Kernochan.

The children were upstairs with Mrs. Dowd.

From the closed bedroom came little shuddering sobs,—hiccoughs, and more hiccoughs, then another outburst of hysterical crying, after which—silence.

"God help me!" sobbed Mrs. Kernochan, lifting red and swollen eyes from within her knotted hands, where she sat curiously crumpled and disheveled on a low chair. "Go out and get a doctor, Jim; there's a good man. Let the law come and take me; only, don't let her die."

Kernochan was gone. In the long silence, while the woman seemed to shrink momentarily into her bowed and crushed self, came again the sounds from the closed room, but fainter. Their dying faintness

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stirred the woman to a paroxysm of fresh remorse,
wherein she groaned aloud.

When Kernochan came back, with doubled steps along the hall, he turned at the doorway, with knitted brows, to introduce a huge figure in black, who inclined his head, perhaps needlessly, to pass through the low frame. An enormous head and neck, strong-featured, an enormous paunch under the dusty folds of a black waistcoat, bear-gaited, heavy-lipped, dangling a toy of a medicine-case on one fat finger—

“Doctor Mullaney,” said Kernochan.
But Mrs. Kernochan did not look up.
Evidently the doctor could do very well without the social amenities. He was not loquacious. If one could judge by the easy manner with which he commandeered the coal-hod, he was a user of tobacco. He straightened up, set his worn medicine-case on the table among the untouched supper-things, and ran his fat fingers through his shock hair.

“Ye'll find her in the room there,” Kernochan motioned, anticipating his question.

“Bring a lamp, then,” said the doctor.
It was minutes before he came back—minutes of silence, in which the woman listened attently for sounds or comments from the closed room. She could hear the light movement of steps, perhaps the rustle of bed-clothes,—through it all faint sobbing. But neither man spoke a word.

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When they returned the doctor ordered water in a tumbler. While Kernochan went for it, he paced twice the length of the room. Then, pausing momentarily before the bowed woman, in a voice not unlike the rumble of an earthquake, he remarked:

"Ye say ye licked the kid?"

Mrs. Kernochan could not lift her eyes to him.

"Yes; God help me!" she said. "I'm the one that done it."

The doctor finished his stride, took the water from Kernochan, compounded a dose, and disappeared within the bedroom. He was gone a long time, and one might have thought he was watching the critical fluctuations of a dying person. Certainly Angelina Kernochan thought so, and she was sunk beyond words when he returned. Kernochan stood beside his unhappy wife, the gray wrinkles between his eyes not relaxed.

"What's the worst, Doc," he ventured, as that saturnine personage resumed his portentous pacing.

By way of answer the physician threw him a sour glare. For one thing, he did not like familiarity. At length he vouchsafed the query:

"What did you hit her with?"

Kernochan brought the "neat little thing" and placed it in the doctor's hand, who weighed it and scrutinized it with a dark amusement.

"Humph!" he ejaculated meaningly, and continued his diabolical walk, while the two souls be-

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side him cowered in the torments of the damned. At length he paused beside the coal-hod and fixed his glare on Angelina, while he toyed prettily with the instrument of torture, not entirely devoid of the suggestion that he could employ it himself if he had a mind.

"All I've got to say to you, me good woman," he ejaculated at length, "is, the next time you undertake to lick that youngster you'd better hit her just once or twice *more*, d'ye see? And then we can get you what belongs to you."

Neither Kernochan nor his wife could lift their eyes to his heavy words. They were startled by the rattle of the cat-o'-nine-tails as, flung across the room, it fell in the coal-hod, and by the bang of the door as the doctor flung it to behind him.

Never mother watched more tenderly beside her own than Angelina Kernochan beside the little figure that slept palely through the night. From time to time she lifted the bedclothes gently, that they might not weigh too heavy where she knew the red welts were. From time to time she sobbed drily and kissed the little chromo crucifix she held in her hand.

But not until morning had begun to streak gray through the high window of patterned glass did she find the comfort which broke her heart. The Princess was stirring,—had opened her eyes,—saw her

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sitting there,—saw the red sorrow in her swollen
lids.

"Dearie, dearie!" said the watcher, in soft, plaintive tones: "Can ye forgive the old beast that hurt ye so?"

For answer the child rose in bed. There was neither fear nor resentment in her candid eyes, only they turned infinitely sorrowful for the spectacle before her. She stretched her little arms as wide as she could, and

"Mamma, mamma! I' so sorry for you," came the little golden voice.

VII

DREAMS! dreams! Dreams and realities! Which is which?—and *how* they dance, commingle, interchange and dispart!—the insubstantial and the corporeal,—fancy-born and wove-of-flesh. Touch them and see, and know forever. But wait: Who said, now, that a thing like a finger should be judge of truth?—or a thing like a heart, for that matter? The things that never were, they never die. The thing that is lives but to perish!

You are looking, O you wise old perspicacious reader! at the age-scarred, slat-backed chair that was your grandmother's. Can you see it, now, just as it is,—so much wood, varnish, rushes?—without any Puritan simplicity of design; without the old lady and her mob-cap who sat (*dreaming!*) in it; without the six maiden aunts who occupied it in turn, being wooed (stiffly enough at first) by six manly fellows in Prince Imperials somewhere opposite; without any sweet, or blessed, or sorrowful memory whatever? Or, granting that they were substantial enough, can you see them each one as they were, without any hopes, fancies, ambitions,

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fears or failures,—no heavens, no hells, no errors of judgment? Or, admitting these, could you see them coolly, laughingly or pityingly, without your own romantic heart getting mixed in the skein, and making something more yourself than them?

Not that the Princess cared, or ever dreamed that there was anything to care about. *She* never saw a common staircase, nor a common house, nor, indeed, anything whatsoever common, or "mere." Nine wonderful faculties (or were there more?) awakened on the way up to Miss Breen's, and invested every shadowy corner with color and meaning, and even lent a glory to that desiccated person herself. Only she knew now that she must never tell any more connected tales and that she must be careful to mention only those things that Mrs. Kernochan and the others had previously verified with their very reliable senses.

Was not Miss Breen a very wonderful person—a hairdresser, to wit, and a manicure into the bargain? She was so very slender, and so stiff, and so *even* from her shoulders to her shoe-tops, and her black dress, though old, was so scrupulously kept, and garnished with such pretty bits of lace and ribbon, and quaint gathers and folds where a little fulness was needed! And that watch of dull gold, which she hid so completely in a fold of her waist, was of such rare Moresque tracing, with blackened lines—only the square-braided cord showing! But what

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were all these to a face so full of story, like a faded palimpsest, on which a hundred interwoven tales had been written, and erased, only to show through more unmistakably—and all the one long tale, after all, of a common soul, storm-driven, but brave and stanch like an old ship's timbers. And Miss Breen had the grace still to decorate that narrow, unsmiling old face with such exquisite little flat ringlets over temple and forehead, all carefully caught in a delicate net of veiling! Oh, it was wonderful! and he must have been a dull person, indeed, who could not read that brave, human something that is in so many of our kind.

Of course, not everybody would be contented with the broad lines of the story—Mrs. Dowd, for instance.

"Her so primp and plain, now," she remarked (whatever that curious collocation might mean). "With the little spit-curls all ringed around her head! Let her not think she's deceivin' any one. *Mis'* Breen, indeed! Sure, there's no mistakin' a married woman."

"She might be a widow," said Mrs. Kernochan.

"She might be," Mrs. Dowd assented. "So might huckleberries be haws. Once they've lived with a man, they're never the same afterward." (One might have thought she was discussing pterodactyls, or other prehistoric monsters, with which she had nothing whatever to do.) "Sure a widow wouldn't

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be slippin' in and slippin' out so quiet and actin' as if there was some booger or other waitin' in every dark cornder to leap out and grab her. Oh, well; they're all brutes, the best o' them."

"Mind what you say, now," Mrs. Kernochan cautioned.

"Everybody knows *you're* happily married," said Mrs. Dowd. "Sure, haven't ye got four childer under yer feet, and nothin' to do but work from mornin' till night?"

From all which bitter wisdom the eyes of the child were holden. She only knew that once the stiff Miss Breen had stooped and clasped her to her lean breast with an embrace crushing, yet wonderfully gentle. And the gesture of the hands that enfolded her was the gesture of a Madonna, but the fingers were thin and dry as wooden sticks. Something there was—the soft crush of the woman's dress where she lay against her shoulder, some faint old perfume, or a subtle aura that breathed from the woman herself, that made the Princess giddy with happiness. And then, looking up, she saw where one lone tear had started from the woman's dry eye, and run half-way down the angle of her nose. The Princess brushed it away with a flirt of her little faery fingers. She wanted to cry, too,—she was so wonderfully happy in this first mother-clasp.

But that was pure impulse.

Miss Breen seemed instantly to have forgotten,

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and it never occurred again. Though the Princess was always thinking it might happen, and wishful that it would. But nothing could steal the memory of that one bright happiness, and the staircase to Miss Breen's always set her heart a-thumping.

Then, had not Miss Breen brought her a dolly? —a china dolly four inches long, with plump little legs and arms fastened to her trunk with bits of silver wire, and blue eyes painted on, and yellow hair? And Miss Breen had made frilly little things to cover its china nakedness, and a dress of figured nainsook, trimmed with lace, and a jaunty bolero jacket of blue satin, edged with gold braid—(the cause of infinite sarcastic comment below-stairs). Truly, one couldn't be expected to think straight in a world of such bewilderingly beautiful things.

And then there was Miss Breen's talk, and the wide doors she threw open to things-that-couldn't-possibly-be-so—of the people "up on the avenoo" who had *six* (6) different pairs of shoes, all as good as new, and of grown-up ladies who were prettier than any dolly, who never wore anything homely, or ragged, or soiled, and of their pretty ways, their gentle manners, their wonderful kindness, and of the lovely little girls, so dainty and sweet—they didn't walk, they just floated past. To be sure, Miss Breen didn't specify that her own trade lay not on "the avenoo" but in the side streets, and that she numbered among her patrons a brewer's wife, and

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a contractor's daughter, who was red-haired and pimply, and very cross, and a Jew woman who didn't pay,—she was too plucky to tell the exact truth.

Then, as if Miss Breen were not enough and to spare, there was the little printer who lived alone in the second-floor-front, who was so short there wasn't room for his legs to straighten out under him, and who therefore went upstairs rather bandy-legged; who stopped on the landings to take snuff, and who blew his nose like a call-to-arms in a red cotton handkerchief. Oh, but his eyes were like a fawn's—so gentle and so friendly; and he cocked his head on one side when he talked, and his black hair was fine as silk, and shone under the light, and he had a quaint, romantic little way of throwing it back in a gleaming, old-fashioned wave from his forehead. Other people (and wiser) could have seen too much color in his nostrils and a flabbiness in his chaps, and a general air of cheap wine alternated with days of beer; but the Princess saw only that his hands were fine, incapable of hurting any one but himself, and the skin of his forehead delicate as satin. It was from his high windows (the very room where her father had died, and whence her mother had been led away) that she saw that wonderful sight of a street from an altitude of twenty feet!—looking down on the heads of the children at play below, and clear over the tops of wagons. Horses looked so fat and funny from up there! . . .

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And then the old Bavarian cabinet-maker and his wife, who lived (and quarreled) in the rear bedroom above Mrs. Dowd's. But who could begin to describe such a marvelous world as even this small one of which the Princess was free? And who could begin to tell the exact truth about it, untouched by any glamor of sentiment or imagining?

Even if I, pale, saturnine biographer under the midnight lamp, and looking back on the Princess and her surroundings through what mists and shadows! could tell the exact truth, it would only be by chance, or by the tightest kind of squeak. But I don't dream of such a thing. And as for the Princess, I only know that she was a little person incapable of seeing straight in a world where there's nothing straight to be seen.

Every day, every visible object, opened doors of wonderment and desire. And presently swung wide the biggest door of all,—that led out beyond the blue rim of the world. And at first it looked like—nothing much.

VIII

WHAT wine was in the morning that made the children's feet all dance? Boys streamed along the sunny gutter, quarreling, arguing, gesticulating like sparrows, following a bit of wood whittled to the size and shape of a penny pickle, which now hurtled high in air, now bounded along the dew-wet pavement, projected by sharp blows from a lath in the hands of a small Italian. Girls, chattering shrilly, careened through the squares of hop-scotch. Against the wall of the old brick house one lonely wee figure watched and imitated.

Presently from somewhere ambled an Italian organ-grinder, big-eyed, pleading, hungry-looking, picturesquely uncomfortable in faded corduroy trousers and a velvet jacket,—a very humble monkey, red-coated, balanced on the corner of his piano wistfully scratching his short ribs. Suddenly the street was a-whirl. To the sublime strains of William Tell overture, little girls in hippity-hoppity pairs waltzed, balanced, two-stepped; while boys, like lumbering bears or like Dutch comedians, as pleased their humors and capacities, capered and

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cavorted in mock-ecstasy. Not a foot in all that glorious company but had been tricked into the delirious lawlessness of spring.

It should have gone on forever, the wonderful sunlight always white and dewy and aglow with fantasy. But nine o'clock was creeping upon them. Somewhere up the street a slattern woman in an areaway called "Willie!" and a scared-looking boy broke from the charmed circle. Consternation was on every face. "School!" somebody whispered. And in a moment the pretty picture had melted away, leaving only the sad-eyed purveyor of aerial sweetness in the gutter and one small figure, pre-occupied, hopping on one foot beside the wall. It may be that her eyes followed a shade too lovingly the disappearing figure of the Italian. It may be—but there! we shall never know, any more than she did, what it was that led out on that wide adventure. She did not *think* she would like to see the big thoroughfare around the corner. She did not think at all. Only those feet kept hopping, hopping, like little rabbits running aimlessly in a garden, until presently they *were* around the corner, and Oh! what a big, roaring world it was out there—ten times as many people, and all strange, and drays crossing and recrossing in front of one another till it seemed as if they were all trying to impale one another with their shafts, or run over one another, or dam up all the traffic in the street beyond; and

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horsecars, with green sides and white tops, creeping half-buried in the confusion, the man in front having his horses continually pushed back against him crosswise, and other horses with jingling harness continually threatening to burst in through his glass windows. And so many different kinds of people! And stores, stores, stores, with such infinite wealth of stuff bursting from them to be spread on boxes and trays and stands along the sidewalk!

To be sure, she was a little cautious. She glanced at her own street-corner out of the tail of her eye to make sure that she did not lose it. But all the while the rabbit feet kept moving, moving, till at last she could see it no more. Then fear seized her. For a moment the vagrant feet were still. She turned, and was going back. . . .

Why did they all shout so on a sudden? And were they shouting at her? . . . But, no! . . . Nobody seemed to notice her. They were all straining eyes up the crowded street in the direction from which she had come. There it seemed the traffic was mounting up like a wall. A dray wheeled across the street, with its big horse rearing and plunging. To her frightened eyes it seemed that one of the green street-cars was turning over on its side. It was all like a great dam reared up, struggling, bursting, threatening to pour its angry flood along the street. Women threw their hands up to heaven, men shouted, gesticulating madly; little children

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scuttled to the cover of friendly doorways. But she, —where should she go?

"Runaway horse!" shouted a fat man, running, hatless, coatless, collarless.

The Princess waited no longer, but fled like a leaf before the gale. In and out among legs and skirts, all running *at* her, past her, across her path, her own pipe-stem legs galvanized with a new and wilder activity. Nearer and louder grew the terror behind her: Nearer, more awful, mounted the fright. Moments lengthened into weeks, and strange powers gripped her muscles, benumbing them in this most critical moment.

She had the sense of being run down, stepped on. The jangling horror was upon her . . . She heard the maddened scream of a plunging horse . . . And then,—she was under a tray of some kind, creeping toward a doorway between its wooden legs. And then she was scurrying down a dim passage-way into some dark interior. And then? . . . frightened and trembling, not knowing where she was, nor how she was ever to get out, nor what terrible thing might happen to her before she could guess, she had dropped on her knees and crept under another tray (the place was full of trays), where she crouched with her back against the wall and peered out, a tiny mouse paralyzed against a wainscot.

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WHAT a strange scene it was that darkled above her! Horizontal lines emerged dimly from the lofty gloom. Then the spaces between began to glow faintly in various colors,—little oblongs, like bricks on end, rows on rows of them, one above the other, mounting to the utter darkness of the ceiling. Her eyes caught light from the piercing yellow point of a "hylo" gas jet, and the whiteness of the street filtered in. She could discern now that the oblongs of color were books, mostly big, like the book Mr. Kernochan owned at home that told all about the Irish, but some little, like the prayer-book "Drammer" Dowd kept on her bureau; but oh, such numbers of them, ranging forward as far as the eye could see, and backward till the gloom swallowed them, and filling all the trays which crowded the floor of the place with scarcely room to pass between. And doubtless the tray above her head was stacked with them.

It was singular how soon the quietness settled in again. To be sure, there was the hullabaloo in the street, but only for a moment, and after that the peaceful-enough tinkle of a horsecar bell; some excited shouting, but presently nothing more terrible than the inconsequential gabble of the usual passing,—and in the long, narrow, frowning room such a silence that she could hear the gas-jet spit.

She would have moved now, but for the footsteps. They were rather pleasant, friendly steps, with the

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homely, brisk squeak of well-seasoned leather. Opposite where she hid, a cross-aisle cut the long trays in two. In the opposite wall a small, dim cellarway door. Before the door a short high-stool.

Somebody drew the stool into the aisle and sat upon it, twining his feet in its legs, facing toward the street, whence the light fell silverly on his upturned countenance and his big convex glasses—rather a rusty-looking person, but scrupulously neat. He was not very old, though the hair on his dome was exceedingly thin; nor very young, though his lean face, guiltless of hair, was bland and innocent as a child's. It was an excessively plain German face, sensible, kindly, and very quiet, quaintly brown-skinned. But it glowed mildly. Evidently he was rehearsing, with some amusement, what had just happened in the street.

There was a very good chance for being frightened, but she was not noticeably so. She had a mind to make a dive for the street, but he did not seem so terrible. The little mouse against the wainscot waited, very still. He stirred—perhaps he would go away again, leaving the place as silent as before. He faced about, and sat staring up at the tiers of books above her. He was a little like a wooden Buddha, a little like a Chinese mandarin, a little like an owl, sitting there. He arose and turned up the gas-jet. He returned to his stool and resumed his scrutiny. By degrees his eyes

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dropped—now he was looking at the tray above her—now, she thought, they had fallen to where she lay. The big goggles glowed and flashed back the gas-jet's rays like a goblin's headlights. And the Buddha-like silence hung like a curtain. There could be no doubt, now, that he had descried the ball of rather soiled and frightened white stuff under the tray, and a pair of very mouse-like small eyes. Then,

“Hello, what have we here?” came a voice of mild surprise.

IX

I WASN'T stealin' nuffin'," said the Princess, looking very, very guilty (for her).

"You weren't?" The tone was gentle, dry, incredulous. "Let me see just how bad you are." He reached under the table and lifting the stray from her hiding-place, seated her on a trayful of books before him. "You have no guns?" he asked, with immense mock amazement. "Are you sure there are no long, sharp knives hidden in your belt?—no cutlass?—no cock hat?—no pirate boots?" He straightened up, and managed to convey, despite his owl-like features, a sense of great relief and reassurance. "Then you don't really intend to hurt me? or burn my store up? or walk off with my books?"

She was too young to catch the drift, but not too young to feel suddenly and surprisingly at ease. And where had she seen such a face? His skin in the gaslight was a crinkly golden screen, and though his features as such did not move perceptibly, a million coruscating particles on its surface (so it

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seemed) managed to convey an infinite variety of delicate amusement. Little smiles twinkled and stopped, twinkled and stopped, all around his lean mouth and in the corners of his eyes, and his eye-glasses sparkled a fairy dance.

"I'm afraid to go home," said the Princess, wisely ignoring the talk of pirate boots, which she didn't understand, and looking brave but fearful. She clenched her hands whitely.

Instantly the amusement fled from his face, and he was all sympathetic concern.

"Where is your home?" he asked.

"It's a long, *long* way off."

"Ah, yes," he sighed, his face suffused with sudden intelligence; "I'm afraid it is."

Once more he was talking of things she did not understand, though she only knew that his remark sounded oddly. The fact is, he was scrutinizing her with the quiet joy of one who has made a "find" under the most sensational circumstances. If he had come upon an old illuminated text in a waste-paper can, much soiled but unmistakable, his surprise and delight could not have been greater. How instantly he understood the wide angle of her eyes, their limpid depths; the sensitiveness of her hands, tiny as they were; the story in her fingers; the beauty of one baby fingernail with its opalescent pink! And as for the stringy hair, he saw that its beauty was only hidden,—and the pipe-stem legs that dangled

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before him, they were only *starved*. These things only confirmed what the little oval face and the big brown eyes were saying of a far birth and a strange wandering. That the lips murmured of living "a long, long way off" was the merest coincidence.

"If you will tell me the name of the street," he went on, looking very grave and very wise, "I think we can go out and find it."

She was not quite sure of the street's name, but there was a little park in it. Ah, yes, he knew. And they could find it easily. She went on, then, to explain her presence in the bookshop, and the bookman listened very gently. He knew all about the horse. It had really done no harm, being brought to terms on the next crossing.

"And what is your name?" he asked, cocking his head to catch every slightest accent of her voice as though it had been faint music.

"Ma-aggy." She imitated Mrs. Dowd's bleat very creditably.

"Ma-aggy?" he said instantly. "Oh, no." He did not mean to be impolite. "But what's the other part?"

"My mamma's name is Kernochan," she stuttered, abashed. "But that isn't my name. My name is Gresham."

"Gresham?" he repeated. "Ah, that's better. Margaret Gresham?—perhaps that's it. That wouldn't be a very bad misfit. Or, Marjorie?"

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That's better yet. But no! . . . wait! *Margarita!*—there it is—'A little dancing pearl.' Margarita Gresham, that is your real name. You see, we all have our real names; and then we have other names that people call us by. Oftentimes nobody knows our real names,—not even ourselves. Now, my real name and the name I am called by happen to be the same. I am Otto—Otto Lilienthal" (he gave the German pronunciation). "Otto," he said, pointing to his chest, "that's me. It sounds like a rainy day, doesn't it? But it really means 'happy.' Suppose we say 'happy-on-a-rainy-day,'—that's Otto, you see. Then there's 'Lilenthal,' which means a valley white with lilies."

"That's very pretty," said the Princess. "I saw a lily once in a window. But I don't know what a valley is."

For answer the bookman turned to a row of old folio geographies in which he managed to find a picture of a very wonderful valley, and the child's mind visibly expanded as she took in the sense of it.

"But I was christened for Saint Margaret," she said, "and I wear her blessing around my neck." She reached down into the neck of her dress and drew forth a black cord and a much-soiled scapula.

"Oh," said the bookman, suddenly struck dumb. "Nevertheless, I still think the priest would have christened you Margarita if he had known that was your real name."

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She lowered her eyes and kicked her heels. "I'm glad," she said, with a little touch of pretty pride, "that you found out what my real name was, and told me. I like Margarita so much better than Maggie. I will remember."

She was quite at home now. She had forgotten her anxiety about getting back, and she wanted to know if there were pictures in all his books. From a forgotten corner he brought an array of children's books, some with curious old-fashioned drawings and colored pictures. And when he opened them, fairyland threw wide its gates. Not for the child only, who prattled on with ever fresh outbursts of delight, but also, it would seem, for the bookman, who gazed with an unsated wonder on the child herself. If the light silvering from his shop windows had suddenly danced into shining crystalline forms revealing Oberon and Queen Mab, he might have been bored, but this delicate thing before him in flesh and blood and soiled linen was altogether too wonderful. And there was more—much, much more. For behind Otto Lilienthal's wonder there was a long, long hunger for the beautiful which earth had indifferently satisfied. The rare soul within him had been underfed, just like the Princess's pipe-stem legs, but in a different wise. And now he was drinking at faery fountains just as was the child. And they were quite absurdly happy.

She looked up suddenly and surprised a full-



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fledged smile broadening on his features. Instantly her arms were up and around his neck.

"Oh," she said, "I'm so happy. I—I *love* you."

"Tut, tut!" said the bookman, with a red flush mantling suddenly under his brown skin, as he drew back and held her two offended little hands at his shoulders. "You mustn't say that." Then he went on, in a whimsical kind of little lecture: "You know, we must be very careful how we love people. Or at least, if we love them, we must be very careful not to tell them so. There are a great many people in the world who don't like it. They—they think it's funny. Sometimes it makes them very angry."

"But—but you do," persisted the Princess, looking deeply hurt.

Slowly the heart of the hungry man melted. He drew the two small hands together and strained them to his breast. Then he said:

"Yes, *Gott sei hilf!*—I do. But I didn't mean to let you know, or anybody. But you were too quick for me. Now you must be very careful, and not tell anybody, for it is my secret."

He smoothed the hair away from her forehead, and kissed the spot with a gentle reverence.

"Let us forget that now," he went on. "But we shall always be friends. And you must come again and see Otto at the old bookstore—No. 39. And now I must get my hat and take you home."

A strange little mouse, old enough now to feel

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the first thrill of pathos, sat and sighed on the book-table, while the bookman fetched Mrs. Bendernagel, a monstrous fat old woman, from the tobacco-shop next door, to keep store for him. Then he set his Alpine hat jauntily on his head, and they sallied forth. Under her arm the Princess carried the most altogether alluring book. And the street with the oh-so-tiny park in it proved to be less than a block away.

X

IF Mrs. Kernochan had not half-killed the Princess, it is doubtful if anything could have induced her to tolerate this new thing. But having indubitably done so, there was a disposition on her part to err magnificently in the other direction. Not that she knew her duty: on the contrary, she was as much bewildered as a setting-hen that has hatched a brood of ducks. But when Margarita stood before her with that look of a martyr clinging to the faith in the face of deadly persecution (only the thing under her arm wasn't exactly a Bible), she thought of the child's dead father and daft mother, and murmured piteously:

"We'll see."

There was a real danger of her discipline being undermined, for there could be no doubt that the Princess did *not* receive as many "lickin's" as the rest of the flock committed to her charge, and in a world where arithmetic plays so huge a part, that is a real reproach. It was Master Timothy . Kernochan's

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high privilege and duty (as he saw it) to remind his mother of this inequity from time to time.

"Why don't you lick her, too?" he said, with a sneering jerk of the thumb toward Margarita. "She's such a *good* little thing!" he whined in a high and mocking key, as with a feinted blow, not quite sharp enough to cause an outcry, his forearm roughed the little girl's hair and jolted her head against the partition.

It was Otto himself who definitely turned the balance, when he appeared one evening after eight, hat in hand and very polite. He spoke rather delightful English, the only reminders of his foreign birth being in the odd little carefulness with which he pricked out the corners of his words, and in the scrupulously grammatical structure of his sentences. He explained how he had found the Princess in his bookshop, being careful *not* to explain about the runaway in the street; spoke of his pleasure in having the child visit him, belittled the gift of the book and promised if the child might be permitted to visit him not only that he would see her safe to her corner, but that she should be properly employed while she was with him; and perhaps he would teach her her A-B-ab's. To show his entire conformability he drank the horn of vile brandy that Kernochan set before him, and sat half-an-hour conversing about politics and high taxes in the ward.

To Mrs. Kernochan his proposal seemed not so

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bad. The Princess, being "small of her age," could pass for five easily, and had been carefully instructed to say that she *was* five, and not how much more she was. In this way, she would be able to mind the baby at least another year while the older children were at school; and now, if she could learn her A-B-C's without going to school, how altogether satisfactory that would be!

And thus was cemented, with entirely proper ceremonies, a friendship which, if Mrs. Kernochan had understood it in all its implications, might well have caused that good woman a fright. For Otto, be it known, *was*—but never mind! we shall soon see what Otto *was*.

For one thing, he always received the Princess with distinction. There was nothing of the ordinary child running into one's shop—a more or less necessary nuisance. If he was near the door when she came, that did not necessarily imply that he had been waiting for her. But he had a way, after his first smiling greeting, of taking his glasses off and wiping them as if there was moisture upon them. At such times she could see what a pale, misty blue his eyes were, slightly blind. And then he would take her by the hand and lead her dancing (she always danced into the bookshop) to where they could talk and tell stories and look at pictures.

Of course the first story-telling was a shock.

The child's eyes grew wide and wider, and dark

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with thoughtfulness and fear, as he went on. When at last her condition became alarming, he stopped, looking deeply concerned, and asked what was wrong.

"It's a story, isn't it?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course it's a story," he said. "It's in the book. See, here are the pictures. Don't you like it?"

"Yes, yes. But——"

"But what?"

"Are *stories* in books?"

"Yes, worlds of them."

Her eyes ran in vague terror over the ranging tiers of books. Alarm and consternation were only too apparent.

"Stories in all of them?"

"Yes," he hesitated. "Stories of some kind, in all of them."

"And did they all get licked?"

"Who?"

"All the people that put the stories in the books."

From the end of the shop came a faint rustling noise. The child sat up like a fawn at sound of the hunter..

"There's somebody in your store," she said.

"Yes,—a quiet gentleman reading a book in my sitting-room," (There was a board partition at the foot of the store, with, evidently, a living-room beyond.) "But now, about this licking——"

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Then, with bated breath, the Princess crossed her legs and leaned low, and told Otto all about the Gray Lady, and briefly what followed. The book-man listened to the little golden voice as if it had been a dream. He did not move. Only at the end of it all, he looked troubled and breathed the slightest sigh.

Seeing which, the child made haste to add:

"But I wasn't lyin'; truly, I wasn't. I saw the Gray Lady again after that. She's—she's"—(with a lost look),—"she's somewhere."

"Yes," said Otto understandingly, "she's somewhere. And the little boy and the black little man. And I wish that all little boys knew enough to look out for the black little man. You and I know. But we must be careful not to tell Mrs. Kernochan, or any of the others, because they might not understand and would be frightened, and wouldn't know what to do. And it's the same with all the stories. They're all true: all good stories are true, but we must be careful not to tell Mrs. Kernochan."

It was the parting of the ways for the Princess, always supposing that the ways hadn't definitely parted for her before the curtains of nativity opened and slipped her tiny form upon the stage of life. She looked lovingly, fearfully, at the tall tiers of books as if she were deciding whether to leap and be lost. But it was the man before her that decided her. One glance into his face and she knew, though

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not in so many words, that her lot must always be with the singers, the dreamers, the idealists, the people who rock themselves to sleep with a story. And the Mrs. Kernochan's must not know.

After that, it was rather a chastened and sober Otto that returned from seeing Margarita to her corner, and he trod the length of his shop to the partition at the rear with a slow and modest step.

"Mr. Snowden," he said, pressing in through the door and seating himself on the arm of a big rocker, "what is truth?"

At the table, examining an ancient black-letter, sat an Eminent Novelist, whom half the world knows by his pen-name—a comfortable, kindly, scholarly gentleman, in a gray sack coat (and spats)—a very carefully-groomed gentleman, rather portly. But what was the most characteristic thing about him was his speech—being a slow sort of music, very deliberate, and very rich and low.

"I don't know that I could tell you instantly, Mr. Lilenthal," he said, passing a hand over his pointed gray beard. "You know that question has been asked before. What do you want to know for?"

Otto smiled helplessly at this rather broad answer and slid into the chair.

"I want to know," he said, "whether I have set a pair of little feet in the road to heaven or to hell." He went on to explain,—and that led inevitably to the story of the Gray Lady.

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"You say a child told you that story? *Incredible!*" said the Eminent Novelist.

"You have nothing but my word for it," Otto replied reproachfully. "Never mind. You call it a story at once. I would call it——"

"What?"

"Well,—clairvoyance. But no, it isn't that. It isn't even clairvoyance. There's no mystery about it at all. The mystery is that so many people can't see these things. Here is Truth, the wan, gray mother of the race; here is Error, the black little man; and here is the Human Soul, the Gray Lady's little boy; . . . and the little boy loves the Black Man in spite of his plain hideousness, . . . and all the good mother can do is pray. That isn't mystery: that's big, plain, brutal fact, and it's to be seen and felt all about us, all the time. No doubt it's right there—in this Kernochan family."

"I'm afraid it's sheer sentiment," said the Eminent Novelist, with the air of one who takes the odd end of an argument just for fun.

"*Warum?*" asked Otto.

"Well, because— In the first place, you assume that the little boy belonged sure enough to the Gray Lady; in the second place, you take it for granted that the little black man wasn't his father, and didn't have any right to him; and then, in the third place, you are supposing that it wasn't a good thing for the little boy to run away from his mother, and that he

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didn't love her better afterward. You see, you're a thorough-paced idealist, and, like all the rest of the tribe, you don't know whether you're a-horse or a-foot."

This might easily have been mere frankness; but it wasn't: it was rather a quizzical, half-pathetic sort of humor. Otto, looking very sober, squirmed in his chair.

"Yes, God help me," he said; "so I am. And I suffer for it by day and by night. But——"

"But what?"

"Even so, I would rather die in my ignorance than awake to the facts."

"That's what I thought you were going to say," said the Novelist, gently amused.

"But whether I would have another"—Otto went on, as if he were reading some far-away legend—"whether I would have another needlessly start up that narrow and thorny road— Do you see?"

"Only too clearly," Mr. Snowden replied. "Whether to administer opiates, or to inject more nitrates and iron into the blood of the race. *To feel or not to feel*,—that is the problem, isn't it? Sometimes, when I see the hard struggle of my fellowmen for the meanest necessities of life, I wish I could arm them with tusks and claws, and a taste for blood, that they might be better able to take and keep what they need. We novelists know. The public knows what it wants! It is not for nothing



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that the pages of our literature (for you may say what you will, it *is* our literature) are overrun with a herd of stinking cowboys, cracksmen, murderers, libertines. Literature is not to inspire, inform, to teach as in other days, but to distract; it is not a tonic, it is a narcotic."

"And yet," said Otto, "when I see these great buildings going up—ten, twelve stories high, and big steel bridges thrown across our rivers, and the streets where men live grow so narrow, and dark, and deep—and stony, I think that the time will come when man will tear it all down in a rage, just to sit beside a thatched hut once more, under some humble vine, with a child on his knee, with the sun on the distant sea, and—and a dream on his lips."

"Very good," said the Novelist, after a long pause. "And now, about this book. It is undoubtedly genuine, and a very beautiful specimen. I don't happen to have the price of it in my weskit, nor anywhere else for that matter. But I know a gentleman who would be very glad to have it at a good figure. I shall send him to you."

"I shall be very happy," Otto nodded. "And also, I trust I shall give no offense if I offer you a modest commission?"

The Novelist's eyes glared for a moment. "What do you take me for!" he rather shouted.

Otto shrugged his shoulders, looking bewildered, repentant, apologetic.

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"You must excuse me, sir," he said, "if I thought for the moment that you were *not* a thorough-paced idealist."

XI

IF Otto had his qualms, it is not to be supposed that he fed on them. There is too much amber, and myrrh, and ivory in the world for the great adventure to be lightly abandoned. No doubt much high and heady wine, too—in spots. But the repentant air-dweller gets over his drunkenness in time, and then he is quite as grossly cocksure of himself as all his more sodden contemporaries. He goes on being—what he is. And Otto couldn't help it. Like the rest of us, he spoke, looked, acted, what was in him, and never suspected what queer stuff it was.

"A man was talking to the woman next door," said the Princess (she had the air of delivering painful news), "and he was a very poor man, all white, and dark, and thin and sick. And I heard what he said. He told her he just got out of the hospital, 'cause they couldn't keep him any longer, and he said a choo-choo train runned over him and cut his arm off, and he couldn't go to work. And you could see where his arm was *gone!*" Here she made the motion of amputating her own small mem-

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ber. "And," she went on, "the woman next door told him: 'Tell it to Swecney!'"

Otto, looking very grave, shook his head.

"Too bad," he murmured. "She wasn't a believer."

"And then the poor man went away, and she told my mamma that his arm wasn't gone at all . . . it was just doubled up behind him." She spoke with the most pained indecision. "Do you think his arm was doubled up behind him?"

"I don't know," said Otto. "I shouldn't want to know. She should have believed his story. It was meant to be believed. Not believing people is what makes so much lying in the world. This thing of everybody being his own God, his own judge of right and wrong—" But he stopped abruptly, realizing that she couldn't possibly understand.

"I like to believe what the man said," the Princess, remarked, looking a great deal happier. "But I wish the train didn't cut his arm off."

"It's best to believe it," said Otto, "and then if the man did have his arm, so much the better. No doubt he was very poor, and very sick,—worse than the woman could imagine. We must try not to make any more sickness in the world than is here already. And the worst sickness that there is in the world is—not believing."

It was esoteric doctrine for a child; but if it seems strange that a grown man should offer it to one of

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such tender years, a stranger thing is that the child absorbed it. Not that Otto deliberately attempted a philosophy, or ventured very deep in explanation. But, being saturated with his peculiar ideas, and, so to say, *oozing* them, and the child being, like all children, a *sponge*, it was not unnatural that she should drink the crazy ichor. It never occurred to her, for instance, any more than it had to him, that *everything* was to be believed. Instinctively she knew that it was only the hard things, the impossible things, and then again the things that were brave, and sweet, and pure, that must be believed. The cruel, and the hard, and the bitter—these were too easy for the resolute soul to accept as sure-enough and satisfying. It was very quaint to hear the child half-whisper :

“Grammer Dowd, I think she’s a believer; but she’s like us, she’s afraid to let Mamma K. know, and Papa K., and all the rest. She’s even afraid to tell me! And Miss Breen’s a believer—I know; but she’s afraid, too. She’s awful afraid, Miss Breen is. And the printer, too. But Mr. Bierbauer and his wife—I don’t think they are.”

In the mind of the Princess still burned like acid the memory of one bright Sunday morning when she had climbed to the door of the Bavarian cabinet-maker’s room, with her blue-boleroed dolly under her arm (Miss Breen’s dolly), and Mrs. Bierbauer had opened the door with first a weird look, and

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then an odd leer, saying "Come in, sweetheart"; and then Mr. Bierbauer, looking very wild and angry, had gone on storming at his wife, and she hurling back platt-deutsche defiance, and both ignoring the little visitor, who backed against the wall in clammy dismay. There was something queer and thickly poisonous in the atmosphere. She didn't know what it was. Only she knew when Bierbauer flung out wild arms at his wife and she fell crashingly across a chair, a maudlin heap, and Bierbauer seized his hat and rushed from the room, and the Princess followed through the dark door and sat weeping a long while in the hall. No, Bierbauer and his wife were poor devils, and not believers at all. The distinction was not really hard to make—at least not for the heart of a child.

Always the visits to the old-book shop were brief, however—too beautifully brief—and these philosophic flights were short moments, or breath-takings, snatched from the serious business which appeased Mrs. Kernochan. With the aid of a most remarkable picture-book the Princess was led into the labyrinth of words. There was, for instance, a curious geometrical figure called A,—in itself very fascinating; but when it joined with R and M and made ARM, and with P and E and made APE, the wonder and joy of it were quite terrible. To say that the Princess *consumed* this stuff, is to speak stiffly. It

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is the barren truth that she went home the first day
jingling:

A B C D,
E F G,
H I J K,
L M N O P—

and so forth; and that two days later she could identify each of the little crooked diagrams that stood for a sound. Within a week she was sounding out the three-letter words in the A-vowel, and knew in a general way when the vowel was long, when short, and when broad. And always more doors were opening out into that big maze of romance and adventure—faery doors in trees and rocks in a faery forest, with everywhere the hint of little laughing, kindly faces, and glimpses of jewel-like hands and feet.

Under all the work and study, though; under all the story-telling and conversings together, like the bright waters under the earth, lay always the one big theme, as Otto might have called it; and as children in the open seek for the places where the gurgle and splash of the merry flood whispers along the breezes, murmurs up by hill and scarp; as little animals—woodchucks, rabbits, mice,—in the upland sniff the air for rumor of the sparkling stuff, so these two were forever paddling, wading, splashing, in some sun-searched pool, among the leaves.

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"Isn't it funny, Otto," the little girl said (he had taught her to call him that, loving to hear it on those lips), "isn't it funny that everybody doesn't like books, and—and stories, and all those things that you can't see, and can't believe?" She laughed at the very oddity of it. "They don't know how lovely it is, do they?"

"It's very funny," he answered, "and very sad. Because, do you know, they all want to believe—*so bad!* Even Mrs. Bendernagel, next door; even Mrs. Kernochan; but they can't. And they don't know what's the matter. And it hurts them so inside. And all the time they think it's something else that hurts them."

"But, Otto, don't you think we ought to tell them?"

Otto shook his head slowly. "I wish we could," he said, "but we can't. It only mystifies them."

"What's 'mystifies'?" Margarita queried.

Otto scanned the top shelf for a moment. "Well, you know what a mist is? Yesterday morning, for instance—"

"Oh—when you couldn't see the houses across the street, and you could hear wagons coming, but couldn't see them?"

"That's it. And when one of those gets inside your head, then you're mystified. You can't see, you can't understand, and you feel very bad about it. So it's best not to say anything to people you think

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would be troubled by it. The best you can do is to be sorry for them, and love them. They all understand that."

"But you said we must be very careful how we loved people," she remonstrated.

He was taken aback by the child's clear memory. "Yes," he said, "that is true, too. But still, I think you can love people a great deal, if you are only careful not to say anything about it. Love must always be a secret."

Oh, sad old world! In which you may love as much as you please, but you mustn't say anything about it, or it becomes as common and foul as old dollar-bills; in which you may believe as much as you will, but you mustn't share your faith on pain of a friendship lost. The Princess sighed heavily, for it was a sorrow as great as the greatest joy in this wonderful world.

"Why, Otto? Why must it be so? I would so love to talk—and tell people—everything I think."

Otto shrugged his shoulders and his brow at the same time.

"It's an enchantment," he said. "That's all I can say. And it's all due to some wicked old witch; there is no other reason imaginable."

I AM inclined to think that Otto had not at this time fully formulated his theory of the Prince and the Kingdom of Nevercome. At any rate, he did

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not confide it to her that day, nor for many days after. The remainder of that brief half-hour was spent in attempting to describe the true character of a witch, the petty spite which, growing to a murderous calamity, endows such a personality with the strange unreasoning quality by which it is known; and the nature of an enchantment, with its adamantine quality of stockstillness, and its further baleful power of making itself seem natural and right.

In all these hours of work, and thought, and sheer delight, she was gathering, partly by instinct, partly by the occasional unwary word, some details of the man's life. That he had neither father nor mother, wife nor bairn, brother nor sister, she sensed rather than learned. She came to know his little sitting-room, as cooler days drove them to sit by its cheap little self-feeder. A delicate nose taught her that the shadowy cupboard in the corner contained food, and she saw the gas-plate, also usually carefully concealed, on which he cooked his food. In fact, on the days when Otto had sauerkraut and frankfurters almost anybody might have gathered that he prepared his own meals. And then there was the couch along the partition wall that, carefully made up as it was and covered with a Persian shawl, looked so soft and springy it was not hard to see in it a lone man's bed.

Whether this secluded life was good for Otto, immured within his four walls and breathing the

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inevitable dust of his old books by day and by night, may be questioned. Certainly he choked a good deal when he blew the dust from some long-untouched volume, and there were other times when he was seized with odd paroxysms of coughing, and would run away from Margarita as if he were pursued, and she would hear him strangling somewhere in the distance; and he would come back, looking racked and tormented, his cheeks grayly creased.

But what she could not know, could not be expected to guess, was that all the while she was in his heart like sparkling sunshine, like gold and amber lights, and that he waited daily more lovingly for her return.

XII

IT was a bitter morning in mid-December. The weather, which had till then been preternaturally balmy, turned and took an icy spite. Panes of ice along the gutter glared a wicked cold through their dirtiness. A humming, growling wind hustled the people on the street, and promised more and colder. Before yellow veils of street-filth whisked up viciously, the old-clothes inhabitants scurried, hugging themselves in desperate grips. And, worst of all, a lead-gray coldness had quenched the light of a pale straw-colored sun.

Along among the hurrying traffic came the Princess. There was a thing called a hat on her head, felt surely, and sometime navy-blue, pressed deep over her stringy locks, obscuring both ears and eyes. About her slight figure a coat-thing that had been black before Bridget wore the thin nap off, inclined to part from itself in critical places! Very thin cotton stockings, too, no longer black, revealing one bare and grimy knee! Shoes out at the toe! Legs without a calf! Little fingers curled up in the sleeves of the coat-thing, and clinging pinkly by the

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edges! But very brave and resolute for all these. There was a natural dignity about her which kept her from running, but did not, however, reach quite to the tip of her mulberry-red nose.

It was a difficult day for dreaming, and certainly the faery quality of the Princess was sufficiently hidden from view. Otto opened the door quickly to let the wind blow her in, and it blew him a fit of gusty coughing as well. He set her, however, on his high-stool, chafed her hands till they no longer pained her, and removed her hat and coat. Then he brought her a bowl of steaming chicken soup which he had kept hot for her. Afterward he bore her to the proximity of the self-feeder, where, the soup being ended, the lessons began.

Something there was about a ship— And, bad as the weather was, these two went sailing.

“What!” Otto exclaimed, “you never yet saw the sea? Oh, my poor child!” Even these words and grammatical marks fail to convey the depth of feeling he poured into their expression. “You never even stood on the Battery and looked down the Bay? Never saw one of those great birds spreading its wings and slipping down, down into the blue? Never saw one of those black iron cities glide past, going faster and faster, out through the gates of storm and through the mountains of mist?”

Paralyzed by the thought, he wanted to tell her what it was to glide down in one of them,—how the

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long blue miles sped away under you, and the earth rolled and plunged along and you stood still for days and days, storm-wrapped or calm, until at last green ribbon-strands and white sandy lips crept up to you out of the haze, and there was land, and cities pink and white, and long, level meadows, and mountains again.

"Then we must hurry," he said quickly. "There is something very important to be done. On the next warm day we must go to the big new loft building around the corner, and the porter will take us into a little metal cage and shut the door, and we shall go up, up, up, to the very top of the great building, and climb out through the roof, and there we shall behold—*the sea!* Slipping down under the blue rim of the world, lapped and folded in the soft, fleecy stuff, out into the great—"

He stopped electrically. I have always had a fear that he meant to say "unknown," but it was not his way to deal in bromides, particularly of the pessimistic sort,—only he was a sick man and he knew the trend of things.

"What's out there?" asked the child quietly, and he turned and saw that she was going all the way with him.

It was only a moment. And then he lifted his face resolutely, with a warm light aglow upon it.

"Out there," he said, "is the Kingdom of Never-come, or at least the seas that lap its misty shore.

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It's a shifting kind of thing, and when we come near it lifts and moves along, and keeps always just so far ahead of us, like the moon on a winter night. You know the moon walks along as we walk. When we go into the next street, it is there—always so far away, always moving when we move. So does the Kingdom."

"Then we can't go there," Margarita remarked out of big thought-dark eyes.

"Not exactly," Otto assented, "but we can always see it if we stand on tip-toe. Not here in the city, to be sure; there are houses and things in the way. But when we can get on *top* of the houses and things, then we can see. It's always far away; but then again, it's always so near, and that's why we are sad sometimes, and call it the Kingdom of Nevercome."

"'Never' is so sad," the Princess remarked softly.

"Yes; isn't it?" he said. "It's because it is so near. And we ought to be able to cross over all the time. And we can't understand why we never, never do. It's always there."

"Don't you know why, either?" Margarita queried, with a wonderful pathos of trustfulness.

"I do know," he said slowly, "but I never can understand. It's like people being believers; there's an enchantment."

"And a witch?"

"Yes."

"The same old witch?"

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“Yes.”

He went on then, his tongue released, to tell how the creature, a living wall of malignancy, flew round and round the earth, defeating every adventurous seeker, keeping her enchanted realm forever beyond the reach of the eagerest.

“Isn’t it funny, Otto,” she said, “that we never run into her?”

“Ah,” he replied quickly, “you don’t understand. She’s softer than smoke, and quicker than light. We must see the big fly-wheel in the furniture factory some day, and see how all the spokes disappear from view when it goes so fast. She does touch us, though; don’t think she doesn’t. But not on the skin. She only touches us in our hearts and in our heads—so softly that we never know. But deadly poisonous.”

“But what *is* in the Kingdom?” she insisted, never doubting that Otto knew.

He stooped low and spoke softly, earnestly, trying to spell it in three letters. All pretty things . . . all loving things . . . all things tender and dear . . . all brave friends . . . all pure hopes, —he tried to step it down to a child’s intelligence; and he must have succeeded, for the child’s eyes went on from depth to depth.

“But, Otto,—” she protested, “not *all*. Because there are so many brave friends here—there is you, and Miss Breen, and—and Grammer Dowd. And

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there's my pretty dolly. Oh—and books! books! books!"

Otto received the catalogue very quietly. "That's all true," he said. "That's because the Prince has been here. The old witch cannot keep him out. All she can do is to make *us* keep him out. And that's the way she keeps us away from the Kingdom. It's hard to understand, isn't it?" he asked.

It was hard to understand,—very. That the Prince had been here, that he had left no home, no heart untouched; that he wanted to bring his Kingdom in and do away with the Old Witch forever; that he never could get the thing really started, though he was forever at it, because people's hearts were all poisoned against him, and that the Old Witch had poison enough in her little finger to keep them poisoned forever and a day— It was all very strange, and all very hard to understand; and yet not at all difficult to conceive.

"We call it the Kingdom of Nevercome," he went on, with a kind of fascinated reiteration, "because it is so near, because it should be here now, because we think it must come some time, because our hearts are so hungry for it. In that Kingdom," he said, clasping her for the moment in an impulsive, tense little embrace, "nobody ever hates anybody else, and so they are ten times as strong; and being so strong they work and work till they have made everything very beautiful. And because they are so strong

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they always understand. And when people understand one another, there can be no more hating. Hate, you know, is just another name for stupidity. You don't know what I mean—”

“Oh, yes, I do,” she broke in; “I know what hating is, and I know what it means to be stupid.”

“And so, you see,” he went on, ignoring her interruption, “there is another little secret name for the Kingdom of Nevercome—a little secret in the very heart of it,—and that name is the *Kingdom of Kindness*. It's a very dear and precious Kingdom.”

He was unmistakably sentimental now, and the moisture in his eye had formed a tear that escaped.

Margarita was exceedingly grave.

“But, Otto,” she said, “you said the Prince was always coming here and touching us—touching our hearts. Couldn't we *help him come*, by, maybe, keeping the door open for him, and putting something behind it, so the Old Witch couldn't close it again? And then if he came, wouldn't that be a part of his Kingdom?”

The bookman smiled, and in his smile was a sunset, and a tear, and a thought of someone singing.

“Yes, little lady,” he said dreamily. “It's very possible; it's very necessary. Whenever the air of kindness is about us, whenever we have a true thought about it, whenever we do some gentle, generous, understanding thing, the Kingdom is there—for that moment.” And then, clasping her again

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and laying his face close to hers: "And I wouldn't wonder if the Prince would be willing to come and live in *your* heart always."

"And then we would be married!" cried the child with sudden delight, "and he would never be unhappy any more."

"And then you would be married," Otto asseverated, with solemn tenderness, "and you would be his beautiful little bride."

He had laid his hand reverently, lightly, on her head, and now he regarded her steadily, while the light in his face seemed to glow and burn,—burn softer, warmer, fainter.

"*Princess*," he murmured, almost a whisper. "I salute thee, *Princess! Morituri*—"

She waited. "What was that, Otto?" she said. "I didn't understand."

"It was—a mistake," he said, with fresh firmness. "And now let us get to our ship again." But the Princess did not forget.

XIII

IT was a good thing that Margarita was six, and not seven. Seven is alert, keen, timorous. The rumor of a new octave of life is already in the heart. Eager, fearful, ready to leap at the slightest sound, anticipatory of new, strange things—changes—the soul of seven begins to plot, demark, define, vaguely to understand. But for six everything is still fluid, soft, indeterminate, vapor-wrapped, mysterious. Faith solves so much for six!

From the top of the loft-building, on the first warm morning, having been lifted by Otto till she could breast the parapet, Margarita looked down on the crazy patchwork of roofs and yards beneath, and out upon the sea. At first it clutched her like a big, cold hand at her chest, and she pushed her toes hard against the bricks of the parapet to get away. Then the bigness and the wonder surged back upon her. Far away, yet distinctly visible, was the blue rim of the world, just as Otto had said, a faithful circle lying over sea and headland and on a hundred hills. And there were the ships slipping down on the soft gray fabric of the sea, on paths of spangled

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gold. One already was empearled on the horizon, and it was difficult to think that the shimmering thing was made of wood and sailcloth, and that there were people on board. At seven she would have wanted to examine so mighty a panorama, would have been interested in the details. But now it was enough that she had gazed for one half-moment.

She was not agog, as seven would have been. She was silent with the tremendous beauty, the reality, the sureness of it all. Quite fearful, too; yet with the assurance of a big new happiness behind everything.

"But, Otto," she said, as they made their way back to the old-book shop, "you said, you know—about the Old Witch pushing everything back? But I saw that one ship,—and she didn't push the Kingdom back from them, because they were sailing right down into the mist—right into the Kingdom. I saw them going."

"That was for us," he said, "but not for them. If you were on the ship you would see the blue rim of the world away out beyond you, just as you saw it up there. And you would look back at the city, and you would see its towers and chimneys,—yes, even the loft-building where we were,—all beautiful with light and warm with color. You see what a prodigiously busy Old Witch she must be, for she keeps the Kingdom back from *everyone*."

Six was not puzzled, as older, and so-called wiser,

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heads would have been. She knew what she had seen. For her there were no inconsistencies. She was not old enough to haggle at symbols. She saw the problem of the Kingdom, but to her it was simple, and beautiful, and sweet. There could be no doubt that Otto was one who consciously kept the door ajar for the Prince, and that he held much converse with him in the quiet hours in the cavernous old-book shop. For herself, it was like a shining dream that came again and again and shed a wonderful brightness on the dim pattern of common days.

"If we could only make a ship that would sail right on *through* the Old Witch!" she exclaimed, "and catch up with the Kingdom."

"But we can't do that, you know." He spoke eagerly, like one who seizes an opportunity. "There is only one sure-enough way to get past her—only one."

She waited silently for him to explain, as she knew he would. Meanwhile, he watched her face as a physician does when he has injected some drastic drug and looks for its reaction.

"That," he said, "is by invitation. Sometimes, if the Prince knows that you've been a believer, and have kept the door open, he whispers that you may come with him and stay always. Not every one, you understand!" he cautioned with a well-heightened earnestness. "Only those he feels sure he can trust. Oh, it's a great thing, I tell you!"

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She was following him now with eyes big and dark as the eternities. But Otto did not fail her; indeed, he could not. He was lifted magnificently up; he was beatifically happy. His face shone with a radiance; and the smile that he bent upon her had a strange power of levitation in it. She shared his ecstasy quite wonderfully.

DURING that winter there were many happy hours for the little girl. She had learned by now to read with remarkable facility. The old-book shop had become a lending library, and week after week she bore away new books to consume. With the Brothers Grimm in their dark, tangled little forest, with Hans Christian Andersen and the angels, with Perrault and his airy creatures, she journeyed far by land and sea. These all, she knew, had crept down behind the blue veil that rims the world, but that made not one whit of difference. And then there were clans of fairies, nixies, sprites, "little people," from Scotland, Ireland and the mountains of the north—all good to honest believers,—bright company in the old brick house opposite the oh-so-tiny park.

She bore the winter well, missing only a day here and there from her visits to the bookshop, except for the week that she was kept abed with a bilious spell. But Otto shivered much under the icy winds. Often she found him hugging the stove in his little

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back room, his face flushed with cold. At other times he was so thin, and gray, and tired-looking, as if he had spent restless nights. He coughed a great deal now, and sometimes the way the veins stood out on his pale forehead frightened her. She wanted to run when the paroxysms seized him and he seemed strangling, but love of the man held her terror-bound at his feet.

"Nasty old cough!" said the Princess one day.
"Why don't you go away from Otto?"

"I'm afraid it's Otto who will have to go away," he said, as he regained a brief composure. "The cough lives here in these crowded city streets; it belongs here, and Otto doesn't." Then he added, a shade more seriously: "Don't you think I'd better go away for a while, and perhaps I could leave the old cough behind?"

Happily, she did not seem oppressed.

"Maybe you'd better," she said. "We had a kitten once that coughed and sneezed all the time. First he was a little bit of a kitten, and then he got bigger. But the sneezing wouldn't let him grow to be a big cat. He was always crying down his cheeks, and sometimes his eyes were all full of yellow stuff. And his skin looked sick. He had something the matter with it. So Mamma K. said Papa Jim must drown the kitten. But Bridget cried, and I cried, and Mattie cried, too. So Papa Jim said maybe if he took the kitten a long ways off he would get

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better. Then we said he could, and maybe he'd come back some day all well and strong, and a big cat. And Papa Jim said maybe he would. And the next day the kitten was gone. And Papa told Mamma K. that he took him down to Quincey's Slip and let him go. So maybe some day he'll come back."

"Maybe so," said Otto.

Foul spring weather but aggravated Otto's disease. The streets were so filled with slush and wet filth that more than once he had to take the child's shoes off and dry them by the fire before he would suffer her to return. Daily, it seemed, he grew grayer, older, more weary-looking.

"Princess," he said one day, with a little gasping of the chest, "I am getting so tired of this coughing, I must go away, 'way off, and rest, and get rid of it. You won't mind if I go?"

Instantly then, as if it had been working up through her mind in all these days, came the question he dreaded:

"But you wouldn't be gone long? You would soon come back again to the bookstore?"

For once, strangely, he turned away from her and paced the aisle wearily, a little dejectedly. It was harder than he had thought, though he had been always courageous in facing it. For a second he could not let her see his face. Then, suddenly, he

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flashed shiningly upon her, his old beautiful smile beaming in his eyes.

"But what if the Prince—!" he said, his voice trembling up to a peculiar exaltation, "what if the Prince should speak to me?—and—and ask me to come?"

As if a light of angels had flashed on the scene, the child lifted her eyes radiant. Joy overspread her features, and she clasped her hands in ecstasy.

"Oh, wouldn't that be beautiful!" she exclaimed. And in all her transfigured face he could not find one trace of selfish sorrow. Oh, wonderful heart of Six!

It was only a little, then,—only a few days—till he told her definitely. She had made it so easy; she had made it possible for him to rise to his finer self. He bore himself buoyantly, though he was anxious about her. He could see that the little feet constantly wet, the delicate skin repeatedly exposed to cold March weather, had weakened her resistance, and that she was getting a flush of fever. Very tenderly that day he removed both shoes and stockings and dried her feet with a towel. He wrapped her bare legs in a big shawl while she sat by the fire, and listened to the prettiest story he had ever told. And when she came to depart he was very careful that both shoes and stockings were quite dry.

"And oh," he said, as she arose to go, "I forgot to tell you that last night the Prince came and gave me my invitation. And now I may go off with him

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any day. You will come some morning, and Otto will be gone." He opened his hands, palms out, in an almost comical gesture, and lifted his brows in a quizzical smile.

"And will you go in a ship?" she asked, quite flushed with the wonderful thought.

"Yes—" he faltered, "in a ship,—a great, swift, beautiful ship,—down behind the blue rim of the world."

"Won't it be lovely!" said the child, her eyes for the first time showing a trace of pain. Then she added confidentially, "I'm going to be awful good, too, Otto, and keep the door wide open, so maybe some day he will say I can go, too. And then we'll tell stories again, won't we?"

"Perhaps," said Otto, in a voice for him oddly cool, almost brusque. "And now," he added drily, "I want you should put me one little kiss, right here on my temple."

Three weeks later the Princess rose from an attack of near-pneumonia. It may seem strange that she was on the street again so soon, but such is the way among the poor. Very thin, as thin and white as paper, and walking stiffly in her old coat-thing, Margarita sought the bookshop. It was as she had feared. The place looked different. A sharpish young man in a long and badly wrinkled linen duster stood just inside the glass door, looking out. He

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returned her gaze with at first a trace of amusement; then, as she seemed searching his face, with a bit of a glare. At last he opened the door, thrust his head out, and spoke:

“Don’t be standing there by the books, little girl,” he said, not all unkindly.



PART II

I

TEN gray buildings there were, most of them very large, all of them very stony—not prisons exactly, but exceedingly austere and prison-like. Very well kept, also; with broad walks and esplanades and quadrangles wide-spaced between them. And a very well-kept, comfortable-looking gentleman in a gray suit (and spats) walking up the half-mile more or less of driveway through the great park that surrounded the institution. And all,—park, buildings and gentleman, together with the cab he had just dismissed,—on a gentle swell, in the midst of a broad, rich valley, edged round by mountains, a hundred miles or more from where the Princess sat swinging her pipe-stem legs on one of Otto's trays.

Of course, there were orderlies, and formalities and all that sort of thing, but presently the gentleman in the gray spats was in the fine big office of the Superintendent.

“Toodles, as I live!” said the Superintendent.

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"Same old Spike!" exclaimed the gentleman in the gray spats.

Then suddenly these two men, grinning like schoolboys, all ashine with happiness, were patting one another on the back and leading one another to easy chairs by the window where they could look down over park and valley; and that was the more singular because they were both gentlemen of great dignity, especially the very tall one with length, and skin, and stoop not all unlike a crook-neck squash. He looked at first as though he never smiled; his citrus skin, his long, lean face, the fewness of the hairs on his lofty cranium, and the wen in the crease of his nose all served to heighten the impression. It was not hard to understand why he was called "Spike," especially in view of the name "Harrow, M.D." on his door: but why the other gentleman should have been called "Toodles" is one of those mysteries that only the student-body of a fitting-school can explain.

"Let me see," said the Superintendent; "how long is it now—?"

"It must be near forty years," replied the gentleman in spats, "but let's not go back. It's a grew-some subject, this of age."

"And now?"

"Now I am one of those feeble creatures who write novels for the entertainment of a more or less

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exacting public. I don't own up unless I am crowded into a corner."

"Good!" said Harrow, M.D., with a laugh, "and I am one of those corrupt, grasping and cynical alienists. By Jove! but it's good to see you. You must let me 'phone the missis, and have her make a place for you at lunch. And perhaps I can dig up a reasonably good cigar, which, for old time's sake, you won't disdain between meals. But perhaps you brought some baggage? Could I send down and get it?"

THE Eminent Novelist, it appeared, had no baggage; he was on a hasty visit in search of a thing called local color, and he further desired to compare notes with his old friend on the developments of a character of his creation who was, or became, of unsound mind.

"He was all right until I got hold of him," Snowden explained. "But since then he's been getting steadily worse."

And so it chanced (and because there was a four-o'clock train back) that the Eminent Novelist, all eyes and ears, spent an hour before lunch in the lead of a very polite lieutenant of Harrow's examining the interior of a madhouse. It was not half as bad as he had supposed; in fact, on the whole, it was a distinctly cheering and humanizing experience. He discussed it all eagerly with Harrow over the coffee

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and cigars in the Superintendent's pretty house in a dell behind the hill, out of sound and view of the big stone institution.

"There are a great many fine professional gratifications about the work," the Doctor said, blowing smoke straight up. "All these unfortunate people are better here. Many of them become quite sound and well again. The psychiatric aspects are fascinating. There is so much more cheer than you would imagine. As for the material for novels, it abounds, it overflows—romance, tragedy, pathos, heroism, it is all here. But you would need to spend two lifetimes, not two hours, with us before you began to understand. Toward evening the place livens up. You should see the big gymnasium crowded with enthusiastic 'sports'; then there will be social meetings of various kinds. Now and then we have a big dance. Something gay is always on the calendar. By the way, *this* is the day of our big concert! I wonder how I had forgotten. It will last from 2 to 3. Really, you must take in the concert—it's quite a wonderful experience. My chauffeur can get you to the train in twelve minutes on a pinch."

Dr. Harrow studied his watch a moment. "Let us go now," he said. "If we reach the parlors a little early, we shall have a chance to see the people come in."

In a great reception hall they found the scene set for the concert. It was a noble room, with soft-

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toned walls, and elegant chandeliers, great windows softly curtained lining one wall and ends, mild sunlight playing on the polished floor and the mellow richness of oriental rugs—a grand piano open in a screen of green plants; finely modeled chairs and sofas, upholstered with taste. Soon from open passage-ways toward the dormitories came little groups of ladies and gentlemen, occasionally with a white-clad nurse companioning, or trailing quietly behind, but usually quite unaccompanied, moving softly, conversing in pleasant tones, exceedingly well-bred, courteous and inoffensive. If there were oddities of speech and manner, they were discreetly veiled, seeming more like inadvertences. Some, pleasantly smiling, were all grace and friendliness, mildly interested in the Doctor's visitor, wishing the Doctor polite "Good-days" or pausing to clasp his hand. Quickly the room was quite bewilderingly full. There was a rustle at the great staircase then; a slowing down of the hum of voices, a lisp of old silks settling into chairs, and the musicians were upon the scene—a string orchestra of eight excellent musicians, prepared to appeal to a very critical taste, and a soprano soloist, an exceedingly handsome woman, smiling sweetly as Doctor Harrow met her at the staircase and led her to a place behind the screen.

It was difficult for the Eminent Novelist to recall his own easy self-command. He felt ashamed and

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humiliated, being there to spy upon so gentle a group of people. He was flustered and bewildered, wishing he might share their composure. And yet he was there on the stern business of making-notes-for-a-novel! Soothingly the strains of the orchestra rose . . . Harrow was back at his side, and he felt more comfortable. . . . By littles, he could raise his eyes. There were very interesting faces all about him,—rather stately old ladies, men of the finer sort, each with his tragedy concealed beneath a most perfect mantle of gentility. He was rather taken with a little old wisp of a man, deep in an armchair, who sank deeper and deeper into it as the music wove its more perfect spell. His was a little thin face, like parchment, transparent with enthusiasms, with rather stiff white hair thrust straight forward, brushlike, past each temple. Who was it—Zachary Taylor? —that had hair like that? And the little old man sank lower and lower until it seemed that he must be lying on his back in the chair, looking up at the ceiling. It was only a pose, however, or an ecstasy; for now he was straightening up again.

And now, at length the soprano was singing, big-hearted, happy, beautiful woman, beaming cheer. And what a lovely voice heaven had given her!

"Oh, thou sublime, sweet evening star!" poured forth. Then, gently applauded, *"I know that, my Redeemer liveth."*

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"It's usually taboo," whispered Harrow, "anything religious! But she's getting by safely."

Then, as the polite enthusiasm spread through the room, and the applause lingered, the soprano was on her feet again; and now trembled from her lips the air of "*Bonnie Prince Charlie*." Harrow settled back in his chair with the faintest grunt of disapproval. "Merriman——" he said.

What more he would have said, beside this mere man's name, one cannot opine, for suddenly uprose a spectral figure in the very center of the room. Snowden awoke as one beholding a vision. Where had she been hiding? Her dress was the simplest gray-blue thing, with a bit of lace at the throat; but had he ever seen such a beautiful creature before? The soft trembling of her slender figure was wraithlike, but warm sunlight fell in her big opalescent eyes and on flesh of satin, and on big ropes of lustrous brown hair that showed an undertone of gold. Her face was not expressionless, but dreambound. Her fingers moved gracefully to some hidden beat; her lips opened vaguely, feeling for sound. But about her still was a trembling, changeful, intangible something too rare for words. And then, before the nearest soft-footed nurse could get to her side, she was singing, high and clear above the soprano, yet somehow in key, the words of the ballad.

Then followed—Snowden scarcely knew what.

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Certainly a wild kind of tremor ran through the audience. The soprano stopped singing . . . A nurse pressed a handkerchief over the interrupter's mouth, and she struggled a moment to be free. . . . Then there were other nurses about her . . . a doctor, . . . and the poor creature was crushed into a chair. . . . And now she was being led away, utterly weak and crestfallen. An angry hum, like that a colony of excited bees sends forth, and restless movements and frightened eyes, sped through the room. Above the screen of green stuff Harrow shouted to the musicians, and they struck up *The Beautiful Blue Danube*. After that the scene dissolved as if by magic and Mr. Snowden stood gazing on fleeting groups until at last he was quite alone with Harrow in the big room.

"Come," said Harrow. "Thank God, that's over. Have we missed that train, I wonder?"

"Hang all trains!" the Eminent Novelist said snappishly.

Doctor Harrow smiled gently at his friend. "Shall I have one of the doctors bring you a hypodermic, too?" he quizzed.

"Hang all hypodermics," said the Eminent Novelist again. "If I need a hypodermic, let it be whiskey, injected orally. Come, I want to talk."

II

MR. SNOWDEN did miss his train.
He did want to talk.

He was a big man, with a big heart and big emotions, and behind them a big brain: in other words, a big engine with a big governor. He was not very tall, nor very ponderous; but now, with the hectic flush of intense emotion burning under his gray beard, he was nothing less than impressive. Doctor Harrow led the way to his office.

At first Snowden could not sit down; and the Doctor, touching off a fresh cigar, glanced amusedly, tolerantly, rather coolly, out of the corner of his eye at the explosive face of his friend pacing the long Persian rug with the lowered eye and the tense step of an irritated lion.

"Excuse me, Harrow," he said, at length. "I try to get the institutional viewpoint; but, dang me! I fail to do so."

"Don't apologize," said Harrow, a bit wearily. "I understand just how you feel. You must forgive any appearance of professional calm, which I as-

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sure you is not very deep. We need absolutely, however, what little we possess."

"Surely this is not an ordinary case?" the Novelist inquired. "God! such a creature—I never dreamed that sunlight, and air, and scent, and pearl-color, could have been so caught up and caged in a net of flesh. Absolutely, Harrow, I never supposed that there was anything so beautiful in this world!"

Harrow gazed more intently on some object outside, out of deference to his friend's enthusiasm.

"She's rather a pretty woman," he said. "Altogether I think she's one of the most pathetic cases we have." He went on, in tones quite apathetic, to relate her "history." And the novelist, resting for a moment, with one leg on the edge of the Doctor's table, listened closely.

"Great Heavens!" he murmured solemnly, at the end of the recital, and resumed his pacing. Then he stopped suddenly.

"A Godfrey, you say, from Geneseo County? Why, Godfrey is one of the fine old names of that country. And to think that a frail, beautiful thing like that should be the last of her line, heartbroken, mind-broken, washed up here on this shore of lonely wrecks,—the most lonesome, the most beautiful of them all. I say, Harrow; it's hell what can happen to a human being here, isn't it?—I mean among the rocks and thorns of this huge briarpatch of a world,—and nobody strong enough to call a halt. Good

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thing, though, the little one went on. She must have been more or less like her mother; and this world was no place for her."

"Yes; the baby died," Harrow repeated gently; "and probably it is better so."

It was rather late that evening when Mr. Snowden proposed the plan that had been slowly taking shape in his mind. Meantime, the alienist had been very patient with his friend's excitement. Again and again they had tried to get onto other themes, but again and again Snowden came back to the thing that was burdening his mind.

"I shall never be able to forget that look!" he said excitedly. "It will be with me to my dying day. You saw it, Harrow?"

The Doctor showed just the slightest sign of boredom and helplessness, but the Novelist did not notice. He went on:

"The immense, sudden happiness of it!—the up-creeping intelligence! It was like a soul being born again."

"Yes," was all the Doctor could say.

"And, God!—they had to *crush it back!* I'm not blaming you, Harrow,—or anybody," he hastened to explain. "But, I say, Harrow, isn't there just a possibility that a soul like that could be born again,—be led forth like Lazarus out of the prison-house?" He paused eloquently before his friend, whose relaxed and outstretched figure was the very denial

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of enthusiasm. "Suppose, now, that music *is* the doorway. You say she was a singer. . . . It seems reasonable. Suppose someone could throw that door open, and keep it open? Suppose they encouraged her to sing? What would happen?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid," Harrow said regretfully. "And then there's the cost. It couldn't be done here."

"No, not here," the novelist assented, again moving restlessly. "But, why nothing?"

"It would be a long story!" the Doctor replied. "It's only my professional opinion, of course. But I should consider her in the most helpless class of cases. You see, there are brain lesions and all that sort of thing, and nothing but the Everlasting Mercy can heal them. Still, a scientist is a fool who says that anything whatsoever can't be done."

As the evening wore on, there was more to the same effect. But it came to this: that the Doctor did not absolutely close the door, as perhaps he should have done—and all because of a tender regard for an old schooldays chum.

This, then, was the novelist's plan; as he stated it, leaning eagerly over the arm of Harrow's chair, and still laboring under the excitement of the afternoon:

There was, it seemed, a beautiful house, of timber, and stone work, and gables, an ivy-mantled house, built in a ledgy, rolling country of little woods

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and sudden dells—a place of arbutus and first violets, of little trickling watercourses, of cascades of rhododendron and phlox when the old gardener was at work in summer, a place of wrens and phœbe-birds, orioles and stray bobolinks. It was sufficiently lonely. It was walled about. It would make a very good experimental hospital. Its widowed owner, who was a writer, and his son, a lad of ten, would be in Europe all summer. There was an old Chloe in the kitchen, and a Pompey in the butler's pantry, whom the owner hated to discharge. Then there was a big, bony, freckled Scotch nurse, named MacMorran, as good as she was homely, and with an eye as sparkling as her skin was pale. She would come. She would fill the house with rollicking, carefree nurses, who would spend their "off-duty's" with her—a joyous, irrepressible, sympathetic lot. The whole thing was to be under the nominal care of a staff physician, and no expense whatever was to be left to the State.

THAT so hare brained a proposal should have found the slightest acceptance can only be attributed to a concatenation of extraordinary circumstances. To begin with, the thing was not impossible: there was one chance in a million that it might succeed, and science does love to contemplate that one possible exception which may upset all previous formulas and theories. Then, too, Mr.

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Snowden was no ordinary person, and he stood in no ordinary relation to the superintendent of the big institution. He was able to furnish a most attractive equipment for the experiment, and if the whole thing proved a folly, he was amply able to pay for it. Moreover, he was tremendously excited over his plan, and, Harrow reflected, he was worthy of some deference. But, what in all probability turned the scale was the desire to avoid the imputation of harsh and arbitrary repression which, the alienist knew, rested upon the whole of his profession.

Nor was the thing itself easy of accomplishment. There were precedents to look up, endless red tape to unwind, technicalities to overcome, much correspondence to pass. But in the end it was done. And nobody appeared to have suffered any hardship thereby, from the bony Miss MacMorran, who found herself suddenly installed mistress of a beautiful home, to the pale patient herself—"as good," said the nurse, "as a kitten,"—who wandered through the wainscoted rooms, a pearly, half-lucent shadow, or gazed with opalescent eyes on a thousand objects of beauty that she did not recognize, or sat with folded hands in the red-cushioned window-seats gazing out through diamond lattices on tumbling gardens and slants of green.

Doctor Harrow, it is true, had smiled with quiet

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pity of all so-unscientific persons, but he was none the worse for that.

And as for Horace Snowden, if he had any doubt whatsoever of the reasonableness of his venture, he at least considered the truce to his artistic conscience cheaply bought.

III

IT is not violating any confidence to say that Miss Elspeth MacMorran did not *expect* results. She had never pretended that she did. She had a very profound respect, though, for Mr. Snowden, and a warm spot in her heart for the boy, his son, whom she had nursed through an operation. As a consequence of which (meaning her respect for Mr. Snowden), she was quite Scottishly determined that nobody else should treat the experiment lightly. She was quite equal to heaving soggy cornbread (her own make) about the kitchen at a ten-p.m. luncheon when some of the nurses grew more than ordinarily boisterous, and a very good shot she was, as one inflamed eye testified the next day; but when the little red-haired nurse (who was underbred) tried to make Mrs. Gresham waltz with her in a manikin-like exhibition of her helplessness, Miss MacMorran sharply called a halt. She knew instinctively that her employer was very much in earnest, and her Covenanter soul was not one to betray a trust, even in little.

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Mr. Snowden's instructions, indeed, had been very explicit:

"Everything that might awaken a human soul," he had said. "A bit of a flower, a woodland ramble, the sound of some tiny waterfall, the call of a bird, a splash of sunlight by a door, a look, a caress, a word—any one of these may prove the key. Try them all. And, above all, *music!* Let her hear you singing, let the piano waken her at dawn. Encourage her to sing, to strike the keys, to make any sort of musical sound on her own initiative. And—and—Miss MacMorran, see if you can *win her love.*"

Not necessary to say, that. It was wonderful how the touch of the woman's strong hands was soft as eider-down. And stooping to her patient's weakness like that called forth all that was tender in her big granite heart, and gave her eyes a new kind of sparkle. The snowy creature she awakened in the morning yielded so gently to every touch, every suggestion, followed her so like one sleeping, that her love went out to her in an access of piteous affection.

She was compelled, however, to admit to herself after a little that Mrs. Gresham did show a sort of clinging, blind fondness for her—something like the preference of a kitten who doesn't yet clearly distinguish. And there *was* an unmistakable improvement in her appearance of health—a shell-like,

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half-guessed pinkness creeping under the pearly translucence of her skin. But day by day the faithful nurse led her abroad, gathered Star-of-Bethlehem and thrust it into her hand, closing her delicate fingers upon it; led her down by little purring water-courses, or sat knitting by her side in sunny nooks; talked to her as to a little child, and elicited only the old pathetic repetitions, or—silence. Day by day she led her about until she, too, felt as if she were walking in a dream, and each day after lunch she took her to rest, wrapped some light covering about the soft mold of her form, and whispered: "Kiss me, dear heart," as she laid her own lips upon the palely-tinted cheek.

It was all rather harrowing. It got on one's nerves at last. And so it is not to be wondered at that Miss MacMorran's heart quite stood still one morning when she felt cool, slender finger-tips creeping up about her neck, clasping there, drawing her down to the strange shock of lips moving upon her own. The woman had kissed her! To save her life, she could not help the thought that her oft-repeated "Kiss me" had at last reached home, days and days after it was delivered. Perhaps the answer would drift back some day along the same slow channel.

After that it was weeks and weeks before the miracle came. They had tried so hard to get her to sing! Gay groups of them had made madrigals

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and glees; they had gotten all the old songs; out of regard for her they played the best music they could command. But always she sat in a tall upholstered armchair and gazed straight ahead, without the least sign of interest. Sometimes they were quite hysterical afterwards. Sometimes they could laugh off the gloom of it. Sometimes they merely broke up in an oppressed silence.

A staff physician from the State hospital had been there that day. He had spent the afternoon boating with the girls on a lake nearby. He felt quite competent to report that "the patient's health was good," basing his report as much upon Miss MacMorran's statement as upon his own very casual glance at the sick woman. It was late and starlight. The faithful nurse had put "her children" all to bed. Now she wandered on the terrace, while a white scarf of dew crept up over dark shrubberies and flower-masses. It was a little moment for speaking to one's own heart. Then, suddenly, there trembled out on the night air a singing that glided with the mystery and charm of the hour,—a thing so gently poignant that at first it was like a thought, only gradually growing sure. Elspeth MacMorran clasped her hands with the attitude of a saint in rapture. Her heart leaped with swift joy. The unbelievable had happened. Mr. Snowden had been right: the redemption of the lost soul was only a matter of time, of infinite patience.

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How gently, then, through long summer days, through the golden changes of autumn, the miracle was wrought, lies not within the province of words to tell. Only it was very slow. Miss MacMorran wrote to her employer in Europe: "To-day she smiled, and I'm sure that she knew me"; "To-day when I laid a Jack on her breast, the red color rushed to her face, and she said: 'It is beautiful!'" "Last night when I knelt by her bedside, she dropped down beside me and said 'Our Father.'" They were little scraps from detailed reports, but in them the novelist traced the long, sure return.

And then came the days when he was back in his own land, making little trips out from the city to behold for himself the wonderful and beautiful change that was being brought to pass. Like a wild thing she turned from him at first. Then she was like a very tender child waiting and watching for his coming. The change worked faster now. The full tide of life beat back in her blanched cheeks; the warm red color fled and came again. More and more she entered into the life of the glowing girls who came and went on their "off-duty's." Each day won back some memory, some recognition. And Horace Snowden, never doubting now the perfect outworking of the marvel his faith had wrought, knew that this creature of sunlight and air, of snow and dew and captured fragrance, must never leave.

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his side again, for he loved her as he loved beauty
—and more.

It was spring again in the garden at "The Ledges," and they two had wandered down by the little purring waterfalls to the rustic arbor at the bottom. Was she all child that day? or was there a suffusion of something deeper, more earnest, infinitely sweeter? Or was it in the air? At any rate, he turned to her and gazing where the sun-light played in golden pools within her eyes, he said:

"You must never leave me now. I have grown to love you very much. You must always be the mistress of this house. I could never go on without you."

Perhaps the woman was not yet quite dominant in her, for she placed her hands in his outstretched palm quite simply and gladly, as a child does; and when he put his arm protectingly about her, she drew herself up on the bench, and snuggled close under his arm, and lay there smiling, and blushing, and watching the light at play in a shallow pool among lily-pads.

IV

I HAVE been talking to that nurse," said Mrs. Gresham (it was a fortnight since he had made his avowal), "and it all comes back to me, like a strange, wonderful story. I am literally a person walking in a mist. But it is a silver mist, with the light not far away. She has told me all about my sickness, and how queer it seems! . . . I recall the great hospital, and all that,—but dimly. And now I look into your faces—yours and hers—and marvel at your goodness, and your love. You must have understood greatly, beautifully, to believe that after those six years I would waken again. What lies out beyond is like a dim land you read of in a book, you know. I am not afraid, however; I am quite strong and sure, and if I am ever in doubt I have your hand to touch. Not always; sometimes I have to flee to that nurse. But she is very good,—for a woman!"

From which it may be gathered that there was an open joyousness about the creature, a kind of simple, irresponsible gladness. But there were moments, for the quick mind of the novelist very delicious,

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when the woman-consciousness broke on the simple happiness of the child.

"Only this morning," she said, "it came to me fully. You have claimed me out of that darkness—that sickness. And I remember how we used to feel about people who were sick so:—we were *afraid*, you know. We wanted to run from the very thought! And then I realized how brave you were. . . . I rouse myself, and can't believe it true. Aren't you afraid of me, sir? Don't you want to run away while there is yet time?"

During all this recital (it seemed she loved to talk), the woman in her was mounting slowly in the prettiest confusion and frankness. The exquisite color in her cheeks grew, like pink rose-petals strewn in profusion on white marble. Thereto she turned upon him the sweetest, sanest, happiest of laughter, and her hands crept over his like wavelets.

"There has been such a change in you," he said, reflecting her blushes, "and it has come so rapidly. My only fear is that when the time comes and I can call you my own forever, there will be nothing left for me to give. Even to-day, if it should come to-day, I should feel beggared, in spite of that dim land of which you speak. A few weeks ago I could have said that I brought the poor gift of my faith in exchange for your wonderful love; but by that time there will be no need even of my faith. And I wanted so to give something! . . . You must

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keep close to the hand you trust, and Miss MacMorran's. You must be very good and submissive, and not press forward into that dim land. Let it unfold itself before you. There will be so much that is exciting, and you must rest gently between whiles."

But the laws of that land are beyond any man's bidding. There came a day when she was visibly wearied and blanched by the onrush of memory.

"It has been like the bursting of a pent-up river," she said. "It just flowed down on me and buried me. I saw Geneseo again, the old streets, the old houses, the faces of old friends. I turned in at my own house. I saw my aged mother, and my dear aunt,—even the face of my father from far back in my little girlhood. And I knew that they were gone. I have counted the minutes to your returning. I wanted you so much to-night."

He dreaded these uprushes of the past, but he was very happy to think that this one had not overwhelmed her. He knew that she was being swept on toward the later years, with their cruel climax. He wanted to be by her side when their realization came upon her, but he also foresaw the horror of sadness if, after they were married, these things should come and crush her, and his love stand helpless before them.

He could scarcely believe his happiness, then,

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when she laid her head against his shoulder with an exquisite sadness, and said:

"I know all about George now. I remembered the little Episcopal church where we were married . . . the room where we went to live. . . . I remembered that awful summer and autumn. I have been gathering up the details. It was very terrible. I saw him lying there, so pale, so unlike himself . . . I prayed, and for all my prayer I knew that he was dying. I saw him die." She did not quiver, she did not exclaim. He felt that the grace of time had touched her wounds with efficacious balm. But he waited still with dark dread for what was to follow.

"You must tell me if I make the slightest mistake," she said. "I can only trust you perfectly. It would be very terrible if I should believe things that were not so."

He waited incredulous now for that word which he dreaded most of all. He strained his senses for the slightest sigh, the least shudder of remembrance. But she lay quite still, and only the late call of birds echoing in the wood behind them, moved the golden air of sunset. How merciful indeed if over the form of her little child kind nature had made grass and flowers to breathe, not only in that unknown spot where it lay, but in her heart as well! He would feel easier about bringing her to his apartment in the great city. Though, to be sure, it would

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be for but a brief while: already he was talking to her of the journey overseas they were to take, of their dwelling in a strange city, where she would be safe forever from that memory he dreaded.

FORTUNE smiled upon him, he thought, in all the planning of that spring and early summer. His bride had put away sorrow. She lived not like a resurrected soul, but like a soul new-born. He was careful not to speak of the past, for to him it was still dangerous ground; but he felt quite confident that she had been over all its scenes, and that though memory, growing fresher day by day, would bring many things, and some of them shocking, still to light, there were no more terrific sorrows to dread save one, and that mercifully buried under the hand of God.

"Are you quite, quite sure of me?" she asked quizzically, as they talked together in the pretty suite in the big hotel to which he had borne her. "Am I utterly free to wander where I will?—in parks, in streets, in shops,—anywhere, so long as I don't get beyond the tether of your love?"

"Free as air, as birds, as thoughts," he said, accepting her little caress. "But you don't really find it unhandy to have Miss MacMorran along?"

V

THAT was the spring that Jim Kernochan left his job in the power-house. In April, to be exact, he came home and went to bed with grippé. Three days should have been enough; but in two weeks he was scarcely crawling out of his bedroom. He had suffered a good deal of pain, and his always flabby skin hung in white sagging festoons about his face and neck. His short-cropped hair turned nearly white in a fortnight; his beard showed ashy. In a blue flannel shirt open at the throat (he couldn't bear it closed), baggy trousers with the galluses hanging, and carpet slippers, he went from chair to chair in the kitchen aimlessly, a great deal of the time with his head between his hands, sighing heavily, or, in more loquacious mood, discussing bitterly, sometimes blasphemously, the ways of fate. Angie Kernochan was happy when she could get him to go up in the printer's room of a sunny morning and loaf by the windows there.

"What do you think's the matter with him, Doctor?" she asked, when she sensed that Jim wasn't getting well.

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"I can't tell ye, girl," said the gruff old Dr. Mul-laney. "It might be Bright's. I don't want to say. Only he don't respond the way I'd like to see him. There ain't any way you could get him out into the country, now? That's what he needs. Does he growl much about his beer? Not much, eh?—well, see that he don't get any; and don't leave any brandy or rot-gut around where he can find it,—understand?"

Later on he said quite flatly that Jim's best chance lay in a year of life in the open country. "And livin' 's cheaper there," he added.

"Yes, but good G——! how are we going to do it?" Angie asked despairingly. "Poor people can't move into the country. And *besides*, half a loaf is better than no bread, ain't it?" At which the Doctor turned his palms out, made a fish-like mouth, and shuffled away.

From this gloomy atmosphere the Princess was thrust out early each fair morning with baby Matt at her heels. She went with a backward stare of wonderment, for nobody was more keenly aware than she that something was desperately wrong; and the more blank she looked, the more deeply depressed she was, though, of course, she did not understand. She wandered for hours, not understanding; she stopped short in her play, suddenly, as if the heaviness were too great for her. She would have loved to talk to someone who dared feel it all, who

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would venture to interpret. Her heart swelled sadly at thought of Otto. How deeply she would have missed his understanding soul if she had not bit her lips so bravely and stifled the rising thought of him! *He must be so happy now!* As for the others,—Mrs. Kernochan and the rest,—they met sorrow with such a grim despair, hardening their hearts (perhaps it is the one recourse of the poor!). She wandered among them unnoticed, and sometimes she thought Mrs. Kernochan hated her very steadily and very inexplicably.

Life for her had utterly withered. She dreaded night and going indoors. She had even lost her joy in baby Matt that June afternoon when she came upon the wonderful lady in the oh-so-tiny park. It was inconceivable that *she* should have been hidden behind a flowering Deutzia bush, or that she should be sitting there on a common green bench, smiling, easy, a little rough-cut volume in her hand. It was inconceivable that she should have walked in there and sat down. It was inconceivable that she should stay. Yet there she was, and utterly startling. Light seemed to shine from her, to shine through her—through her brown dress that lay in soft, shimmering planes of silky stuff, through her brown hair, literally alight with gold, through her hands and even through the volume that she held. As for her smile, the gently remembering smile, that she bent on the little girl,—not even Otto could

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smile like that,—only—only Otto's smile was more satisfying. But *this* was bewilderingly beautiful.

It was quite natural that, having come upon something so altogether transporting, the Princess's mouth should drop open and she should stick one rather dirty finger into it. Also, her eyes turned very dark, as they always did under intense emotion. There was nothing shimmering about *her*,—a very clear-cut speck of neglected and hungry humanity in a blue-checked gingham apron, with a sure-enough Irish baby tagging at her skirts, her hair combed back flat over her forehead and done pigtail.

"Surely you're not afraid of me?" said the wonderful thing on the bench, and her smile emitted more warm, beautiful sunlight, that fell on the bench and all about down to the grass.

"Yes'm," said the Princess, and baby Matt set up a *Yah-h-h!* Then the lady's head went back, showing a mouth full of lovely teeth, and her laughter tinkled down like little silver bells. In an instant the book was on the bench by her side, and she was offering to baby Matt the most wonderful round golden thing at the end of a long thread-like chain, which she had unburied from the lace about her breast, and which, like everything else about her, seemed to shed light.

She watched them walk away then, the baby tugging and *yah-h-ing*, the Princess sidling, like one transfixed, her finger frozen in her open mouth.

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But something told her they would be back, if not that day, then some other. And the rest of the hour, though they did not dare round the Deutzia bush, she heard them at play just beyond. And these strange words she caught:

"This is the ship—this old dish . . . and this is the sea, all this grass. You can't get into the ship, because it's too little, and besides, it's broke on one side. But you can *play* you get into it. And I'll take you down where the mist is, down to the blue rim of the world, and maybe,—and—and *maybe*—"

And here the words trailed strangely into silence.

MRS. SNOWDEN's instinct was true. They did come again, another day. They peeped at her like little strange wood creatures. They ventured out in the sunshine of her smile. They even came and stood at her knee, and talked with her. But this time she was very careful not to frighten them.

"And have you brought your little ship to-day?" she asked.

Again the Princess looked frightened. How did the lady know about her ship? And if she knew about the ship, did she know about all the rest?

"Nope," she answered at length, slowly. "I let Mattie carry it, and he dropped it on the stones. Then I got a new one: it was a cigar-box. But

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Timmy took it away from me to keep marbles in."

"Ah," sighed the lady. "And now you have no ship to sail down to the blue rim of the world in. Would you like very much to sail down to the blue rim of the world?"

This was positively weird. As if the sound of the beloved and oft-quoted words was not in itself too utterly affecting (and mystifying), there was the queer form and suddenness of the lady's question. Then she *did know all about it!* Things began to clear. Could it be that this strange apparition had come from the Prince?—knew the ways of the Kingdom? And was that why she shimmered so oddly with light?

The lady marked the queer pallor that overspread the child's face now, saw her little knees knocking together, noted the piteous, fleeting looks that came and went in her dark eyes, and beheld her small lips quiver, as she asked:

"Have you seen Otto?"

If the lady had not beheld with her own eyes, she would have known from the voice. The child was overcome with some tremendous emotion. Instantly she clasped the frail, stricken form and lifted her to her lap, where the Princess's head fell protestingly in the hollow of her shoulder.

"No, child," she said softly. "I don't know who Otto is. I wouldn't know if I had seen him."

Somehow the Princess felt better. It would have

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been too sudden, too terribly beautiful, to think that the lady had come from him. She relaxed a little to the woman's embrace, and the luxury of it was so exquisite it hurt. Once before she had been clasped like that on a mother's hungry shoulder, but even Miss Breen's embrace was not like this, did not so overpower her senses.

"Otto is evidently someone you love, and he has gone away," the lady went on soothingly. "You must tell me all about him, and then you will feel better."

Despite the baby, then, who clutched at the lady's silky dress, and stamped his feet, and vociferated with a truly Irish voice of protest and impetuosity, the Princess would have gone on to tell the lady all her fearful and wonderful story; but at that moment, through the wheels of a clattering truck, came a shrill voice:

"Ma-aggie! Ma-agg-ee!"

The child slid from the lady's knee with a hungry, disappointed look.

"Mamma wants me," she said. "To-morrow I'll tell you." Then, lingeringly, "I think I ought to tell you, because I think you are a believer."

Before the clangor of the truck had died away she was gone. Luckily for the Princess, the Deutzia bush hid the lady from the view of the world; but Mrs. Snowden, peering where the branches were thin, saw the lean, hard form of Angelina

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Kernochan standing in the areaway of the old brick house, and knew her,—a little leaner, vastly more anxious-looking, but plainly the same person from whom she had rented a front bedroom eight years before.

VI

THEY had been bold adventures—those two or three hours; rather snatched from the hands of fate. She knew, though, that she would soon be going abroad, very likely for years, perhaps for good; that only two weeks, indeed, remained; and it seemed but the part of loyalty to recall all that she could of that poor broken dream of seven years back, before the doors of visibility closed upon it, and it and poor George Gresham became purely memory.

It had been so pleasant to sit there in the oh-so-tiny park, with a book between her thumb and finger to balk the curiosity of the idle, while her mind ran back to him; and the mere physical surroundings lent a color and verity to her memories that nothing else could have given. He still glowed for her a young god, and she knew that nothing could ever wholly compensate her loss. Pleasant, too, to adventure thus from under the watchful eye of her nurse, to make bold with the most dreadful phase of her experience, and still return unharmed at evening. And she kept these adventures quite secret, only in-

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forming Miss MacMorran and her husband that she had been "exploring."

The glimpse of Angelina Kernochan's bony frame, however, had brought verity to verisimilitude,—a kind of inner electrical sense of fact that made her both eager to question and fearful to ask. When, therefore, after two days (for rain had intervened) she again heard the Princess coming behind the Deutzia bush, she wanted to say: "So you are Mrs. Kernochan's little girl!"—but didn't. Instead she said, as she gathered the child on her lap and stroked the baby's head:

"Well, is there a ship to-day?"

"Yes," said the Princess, snuggling into the silken joy of her shoulder. "I stole my cigar-box back from Timmy, and hid it under the bed. And after he went to school I brought it over here. It's down there in the rose-bushes by the fence."

It was only a step, then, to the broken thread of their story. The healing sun slanted across their shoulders, threw a scarf of romance about them. The child abandoned herself to the sheer luxury of thinking, visualizing, believing, her little voice trembling strangely with the joy of it. It was like daring to think again about *true* things, after living amid lying glooms and shadows. It was like rescue. And the lady's eyes veiled softly, still and tender, as she listened.

She had to hear first about the Prince and his

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Kingdom of Nevercome; and it was very difficult to explain why the Kingdom never comes, when it is always so near. Only a little added tremor in the clasp with which the lady held her, a little straining of her against her heart, convinced the Princess that the lady did understand.

It was harder to learn about Otto and the wonderful hold he had upon the child's imagination. Otto was a believer; Otto was a book-store man; Otto taught her to read; Otto told her oh! so many beautiful stories that were true because they were beautiful. But at last the lady had gained a fairly connected idea of the child's acquaintance with the man, of the relationship that existed between them, and of the glorious ending of it all.

She set the Princess out on her knee, holding her at arm's length, that she might see her the better, that she might behold the miracle of a child's faith. *She* knew what Otto's gusty coughing meant; she had come to the end of her faith, her heart aching dumbly. She wanted now to see the child's faith, undaunted, unquestioning, drifting on through trailing clouds of glory. And that she might the better conceal the question in her gaze, she said:

“Why, child! there's gold in your eyes.”

“There's gold in your eyes, too,” said the Princess, quite seriously and simply.

Just at what moment Lucille Snowden discovered that the child could not be Mrs. Kernochan's it

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would be difficult to say. She was suddenly aware that there was no kinship whatever between the little girl and the baby she was tending. The Princess slid from her knee and ran to get the ship-box for baby Matt, who had at last managed to make himself quite intolerable.

"I saw the other day where you live," the lady said, when she came near again. The Princess pointed in dumb show to the house across the way.

"And what is your mamma's name?"

"Mrs. Kernochan."

Was it the voice, or the manner, or the rose-bud mouth, or the eyes with-gold-in-them that made that answer seem so strange? For the dialect was at least touched with the street.

"Ah, yes. And this is your little brother?"

"Yes'm" (more slowly).

"And your first name is Maggie?"

"Yes'm. But" (quicken), "I've got another really name. Would you like to know what it is?"

"Indeed I would."

"But you must never, never tell any one. Only believers!"

"Only believers," said the lady, clasping her hands in token of assent.

"My really name is Margarita."

"Oh, how beautiful!" said the lady, with genuine pleasure.

"Yes. Otto told me what it was,—or I wouldn't

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have known," she added wistfully. "And I've got another name, too, for Kernochan. That isn't my true name, and Mamma K. isn't my real mamma, you know."

Something snatched suddenly at Lucille Snowden's throat, she couldn't tell why.

"And what is your really other name?" she said. "You see, I want to know them all."

"Gresham," said the child, in the most matter-of-fact manner in the world. But what had happened to the lady? Why did she look so frightened, and shrink back, and her face swell so redly until she looked like somebody else?

"Hurry!" she said, pointing straight ahead of her. "See where the baby is going. He's clear out in the wagon-tracks. Do run, dear!"

FATE, so strangely harsh, is sometimes quite as strangely kind. It was well for both the woman and the child that baby Matt was actually at the moment trapped between approaching wagons, so that one driver had to swing his team up into the park fence to permit the Princess to drag him to safety. Before the incident was quite over, the first wild blast of realization had struck Mrs. Snowden and swept past. The last wall that had shut in her dark years had fallen. Now she knew the meaning of those weird feelings which had remained after, as she supposed, she had made full

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account of the whole chain of events. A sense of utter womanhood swept over her slender body, and through all the aching which it brought her soul yearned wildly, unreasoningly, for the child that she now knew was her own.

She touched her reverently when she came back, as a Madonna might adore the fruit of her own body. Her searching gaze verified each detail, and she marveled that she could have been so wholly blind. She would have gone on to caress and feel the little creature who had suddenly become so beautiful in her eyes, but something held her back. . . . If she should touch the little girl like that, she would draw her very soul out of her,—she would bind her with a love that could not be broken. . . . And that was why she said:

"You must run and play with him now. He grows uneasy, because he doesn't understand what we are talking about. I want to think. Show him the pretty ship."

Too long she sat there, far beyond her wont, unaware that the sun was sinking. Her mind was a riot now. Other children had come into the park; noisy boys were playing ball, mostly with their lungs, outside the palings. The overpowering impulse that rose again and again within her was to speak the few words of allurement that intuition told her were all that was needed, and then, while the child was bewildered, ecstatic, spirit her away. . . . It

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did not seem monstrous, only impossible . . . was the child not her own? Every sense ached wildly for her now. Two or three times she half arose to go to her, and each time she sank back. . . . The Kernochan woman would interpose obstacles, perhaps even defeat her in some strange way entirely. . . . Why wait?—why even hesitate? . . . She could never treat with the Kernochan woman, she knew. She remembered her as one of those dreadfully ignorant people from whom one instinctively shrinks; coarse, and of a sullen temper. . . . Every fiber in her ached now with distraught mother-instinct! Had not the child suffered enough in those long years without her care? How her head ached! and how her body grew feverous as she sat there! And still she could not leave the place.

Vaguely she was aware that noises were lessening in the street. The magpie boys had drifted away. The children had gone—somewhere—from the park. She was alone. A morbid light from the dying sun fell dimly in the street. She was not quite herself. Then she heard Mrs. Kernochan again:

“Ma-aggie! Ma-agg-ee!”

And evidently the child came, for she heard the woman's voice giving instructions of some kind. After that there was a moment or two when the

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street was quite still. Then she gathered herself together and started away.

. . . Half-way to the corner of the street came a little figure hurrying against the wall. In her left hand she dragged an open pail full of foaming beer, while her head was careening on her right shoulder, and her right arm was extended at length, rather in an attempt to carry the precious fluid without slopping than because of its weight.

"Margarita, oh, Margarita!" the woman said, falling on one silken knee on the dirty pavement beside the child. "Do you love me, dear? Will you love me?—and put your arms about my neck, and kiss me? And will you always be my little girl?"

She may have forgotten something; she may have forgotten many things. She was only aware now of a passionate hunger for the child, a passionate indignation that anything could keep her longer from her embrace. The Princess set her pail against the wall, and flung herself upon the lady's neck.

"And never, never leave me?" the woman all but sobbed.

"I wish I could be with you all the time," the Princess said, "but I will be in the park every day."

From its place by the wall the beer sent up its nauseous odor. It was an overpowering insult to the passionate woman. She glanced at it. To think that *her* child should be sent to a corner saloon

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for beer in a pail! She felt her gorge rise, and then— In an instant she was doing the thing that for an hour back had seemed impossible.

“You want to sail down to the blue rim of the world, in a great ship?—really? truly? You want to go out there, with *me*, and search for Otto?—” Her voice was fearful, tremulous, and the eager words poured out a wild flood. “Would you go with me, *now*, to-night? And we should live in a great, beautiful house till the ship was ready? Would you go? And you would be my little girl, and I would be your mamma? And every day you would lie in my arms like this? And we should go out and seek, and seek, for Otto?”

“Right away?” asked the child, in utter simplicity.

“Right this moment.”

“I must take the beer first to Mamma K.”

“We will leave the beer right here by the wall, and Mamma K. will send and get it by-and-by. Shall we go?”

From the silken sweetness of her shoulder the child murmured, “Yes.”

“Then run ahead of me as far as the bookshop, and I will come and get you.”

And in the failing light the slight figure of the Princess fled 'round the street-corner, and the woman came slowly after.

VII

FOLLOWED for Elspeth MacMorran two of the most difficult days of her sensible Scotch existence. Mr. Snowden had been gone twenty-four hours. He had promised to be but forty-eight. The business that called him was a conference of heirs somewhere in the middle west, of whom he was one. Had she known that his forty-eight hours would prove nearly three whole days, she might have let the police in. On the horns of a most tremendous dilemma, she simply waited in what she called a "white fright."

If Mrs. Snowden had succumbed to a return of her malady, it was certainly in a most astounding form. She was entirely calm, entirely happy. She explained fully that she had "stolen her own child," and how, and why. Looking first at one and then at the other, Miss MacMorran felt the force of all she claimed. Obviously, to attempt to separate them in the absence of Mr. Snowden would be fraught with the utmost danger. But to leave matters as they were!—to think of the whole city stirred to its depths by newspaper accounts of the kidnap-

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ing!—to picture the anguish of even the most indifferent of foster-mothers!—this was quite as terrible.

Meantime Mrs. Snowden ordered that no newspaper should be brought to her or even mentioned. She herself met the hotel servants at the door and adroitly excused them from their usual duties in the suite, generally with a liberal tip. Just why nobody in the hotel had suspected Mrs. Snowden of kidnaping the little bareheaded street-girl she brought in at the side entrance of the hotel under the eyes of a dozen servants, or in any wise connected her with the tragedy in the newspapers, is hard to understand, unless it were that Mrs. Snowden was so well known to them, and in appearance so like an angel of light, that their minds simply refused to link her with the traditional figure of kidnaper. As for the rest, the most probable explanation is that everybody supposed everybody else to have seen her lead the child out again, probably that same evening, which, as a matter of fact, nobody had. Meanwhile the Princess, a very real prisoner in the (to her) most distracting of bondages, but wholly unconscious of the fact, looked down from her high window on the roaring traffic of the avenue below, and with especial interest on the blue-coated and brass-buttoned pomp of a rubicund policeman, who would have given two such coats to know that *she* was looking down at him.

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Mr. Snowden, returning early in the evening of the third day, was stricken quite dumb by the situation. His beautiful wife smiled up at him, cooing and cuddling her baby, the very picture of innocent contentment. But Miss MacMorran's hair was distinctly grayer, her eyes were plainly weary and her brow wore deep lines. She was manifestly relieved by his return.

Then he flung himself into the task before him. *If things were as his wife said!*—but he dared not trust such evidence for a moment.

Long before midnight he was in conference with his lawyers. Telephone messages flew. Some time in the long still hours of the night official records were looked up. A doctor was routed out of bed. Another could not be found, for death had set its seal upon his lips. But in the gray of morning a plan was formed, and a man was found to execute it.

By that time they knew that Angelina Kernochan had shut herself out from all rights in the child, and at the same time laid herself open to a very grave charge. She had stated, in answer to the physician who filled out the papers at the time when Lucille Gresham became a public ward, that "the baby had been taken away." It was a bungling answer, and a disingenuous one, but it had been promptly set down in the record as "Dead."

It followed very simply, then, that early that morning appeared at the old brick house opposite

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the altogether-pitiful park, a very grave young man, quite immaculate, twirling eyeglasses on a chain and wearing a tile hat, a very *old* young man, who spoke with most remarkable legal precision, and with a far-away and detached air of great disasters impending. This young gentleman went into conference with Mrs. Kernochan and Jim. He canvassed the grounds very carefully. He supposed a case, and asked questions. While he talked he drew from his pocketbook a crisp bit of white paper neatly folded, with which he tapped his knee, emphasizing his remarks. A long while he balanced the slender thing in his fingers, as he made his points. And when he finally relieved their whetted curiosity by displaying parts of the tiny document to their gaze, they saw that it was a check for a sum large enough to repay the Princess's board from babyhood; and there was the promise of a very handsome addition if the newspapers could be successfully baffled in their everlasting search for sensation.

"After all," said Angie, looking anxiously at Jim, "it ain't no worse than havin' a young one die on ye. And besides, the child is hers—if it *is* her. We could afford to go to the country then, Jim dear, and you'd get well again."

And Angie's voice prevailed. The tangle was straightened out. The newspapers never guessed.

But the Snowdens, nevertheless, hastened their plans. The boy Paul was recalled by telegram

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from a country house in Connecticut where he had begged to spend his last two weeks of America, and in three days more a great iron city bore them all out of the harbor, and down into the misty sea, from which the Princess, looking back, saw the city all dove-color and rose-tints, and tried in vain to make out the tower where she and Otto had stood and talked of just this thing.

PART III

I

LOOKING back, as I do now, on this new phase of her career, I am not at all sure that the Princess, under other and less favorable circumstances, might not have turned out just one more snob, in a world which has never suffered any lack in that direction,—in which case there would have been no story worth telling about her. For I am persuaded that a good many otherwise pleasant and interesting enough persons (who *are* snobs, and therefore of very doubtful value) might have grown into sensible, useful people if they had been delivered at birth to the bony mercies of a Mrs. Kernochan, if they had been obliged to draw reluctant nourishment from a condensed milk can and soda crackers, and if, in general, they had kicked and clawed their way into life to the surprise and mild disgust of humanity at large. Always supposing that this vaccination with misery “took,”—which isn’t necessarily the case.

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Certainly the world that opened before the Princess now was very beautiful, very wonderful, very satisfying. Even from Miss Breen's most circumstantial narratives she had gathered nothing quite so overwhelming. It launched itself upon her, it buried her. That very first morning in the hotel bedroom (and certainly the evening before—an evening of kisses and wailing mother-blandishments—had been bewildering enough), Mrs. Snowden found her looking up with hollow eyes at the pinky cherubs disporting on the ceiling (for everything in that gaudy hostelry was "hand-painted"), and the look was pure fright and helplessness. Quick to fear for her, Mrs. Snowden sensed a storm of homesickness, either present or close at hand. But it was not that—yet. It was just sheer terror of things so far beyond even wild expectation, the shock of too much beauty, and its inevitable reaction. She seemed thinner, oh, so much thinner and paler, than the day before, and the little white fingers that lay on the covers caught and fingered the edge of a fleecy blanket and ran away from it, as if the sensation were too delicious. There was an instinct for everything delicate and fine in those little fingers, but unborn, and this was like being rushed into life unprepared. No wonder that they, too, were tremulous and pale with fear, and clutched the pretty lace coverlid and let it fall, with the gesture of a very sick person.

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Those were hours of great happiness for Mrs. Snowden when she, with her own hands, washed and combed the child's hair (was it not her own and George Gresham's, and did not she love the very *feel* of it?), and scrubbed her browny hands and manicured her nails, and decked her with pretty new frocks, and fitted her with hats. But with every new addition the Princess only looked thinner, whiter, more frightened; the eyes with which she gazed at herself in a great pier mirror looked as though they had seen an apparition, and indeed they were not far wrong.

Inevitably came periods of reaction. She wept bitterly for Mamma K.,—she longed for her homely face and harsh voice with unutterable desire. She longed for abandon, and how she would have run free from that haunting fear if she could have played in the park again, "minding the baby"! She knew now how much even baby Matt meant to her, and how she loved Grandma Dowd, and surly Tim, and even sullen Bridget. Almost she hated Mrs. Snowden. She would sit bolt upright, wondering at herself. Then, more utterly lost and more miserable than ever, she would fling herself face downward on the bed, her fingers working whitely in the lacey bedclothes, no doubt weeping in their own small way for the old threadbare cotton blanket that had been their home so long. Yes, every fiber

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of the Princess was homesick: she was made that way.

"Baby Matt?" said Mrs. Snowden, half catching the scarce-formed words, half anticipating. "Oh, you are longing for children! But, listen;—let me tell you. The *handsomest boy* is coming here soon! And he's only four years older than you are, dear. And you're going to be such good friends! And when we get on the big ship there will be children,—such pretty, happy children!—and you will love them so!"

The Princess looked up sidelong at this. It was interesting, surely, but not attractive. For the moment she hated all pretty, happy children; and baby Matt's face, postmarked with street-dirt, but lovelier for that, loomed before her buried eyes with the joy of vision.

Nor did that handsomest boy, bustling in with a porter and suitcases at his heels, greatly amend matters. No doubt he was a very handsome boy from a purely academic standpoint, and no doubt the Princess regarded him with a more than academic calm. He was jubilantly healthy, almost offensively so. He bounded, or stood stock-still, with his feet apart; but he never walked. His eyes leaped and tumbled boisterously, or widened in cold amazement; they were not ordinary eyes at all. His speech was like that, too; tumbling torrentially, masterful, almost domineering; with, strange to say,

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a trace of baby lisp in it. Regarded statically, he had a peach-blow complexion to drive a Japanese craftsman mad with envy; to make a pretty girl shorten her life voluntarily,—and which he hated like the smallpox. There was flame-like hair, too,—the kind called tow, which he had tried desperately to comb out straight, but in which the curl still gleamed like new gold. He had aristocratic angles about his eyes which he had inherited from his father; and the blue eyes themselves *could* be light and warm as summer seas, and his smile *could* be heavenly; but he was as much ashamed of these as he was of the peach-blow complexion and the curly tow. On the whole, the Princess didn't like him. He was much too fine, too big, too proud; and the red-and-white-striped tie of his own choosing which he had selected to wear that morning much too bright for her sober little eyes.

He stood regarding her, with his feet widely braced and his eyes amazed, not to say affronted, for all the world like a well-fed terrier looking down upon a stray kitten, which he has been privately warned he must not worry.

“Aren't you going to shake hands with this new little sister?” asked Mrs. Snowden, who had knelt beside the child, enveloping and protecting her.

The boy was more than ever amazed, but he did reach out a paw icily,—which the Princess fear-somely touched.

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"You may even kiss her, if you like," said Mrs. Snowden, laughing fun at his absurd airs. But the young gentleman did not "like." He walked away, as if he had stood enough.

"He's afraid of you," whispered Mrs. Snowden. But Master Paul, when he had gotten his father alone, said, in his best third-form sarcasm: "I say, Pater,—are there any more?"

"More what, little son?" said the big man, with quick intuition.

"Any more new mothers, or sisters?"

"Oh, I don't think so,—at least, not just at present." Then he, too, burst into hearty laughter. "Buck up, old man," he said, patting the boy heartily on the back, "you'll be able to labor through it."

But most merciful of all was change,—change and the blue sea, and the big ship, and glimpses and gleams through misty mornings of far lands of dreaming and desire. There *were* children,—lots of them,—on shipboard, and they *were* pretty, and presumably happy; and they did drag her into romps and games; and she did begin to glow a little, and to forget, and—to be a child. But behind it all was the great challenge.

For she couldn't really forget. She gazed out on the blue rim of the world, wide and stark against the sky. Mornings when the mist was on the sea she watched with wonder while the great ship nosed her way into the wheeling cloud-banks, and the waking

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sun lit them through and colored them with an infinite subtlety. What was beneath, behind them? Only more long, wet, rolling waves, more scurrying petrels, more sporting, white-bellied sharks, and then the wide day again, and the blue rim far removed, and the big ship plunging on, and children pulling at her elbow to come and play:

She grew by leaps and bounds those saddish days, and began to know—that it was a long way to Otto. . . .

Of England she gathered only the poorest and gloomiest impression. It was a poor country (it seemed) of docks, and warehouses, and shabby workmen and muddled streets; of a cold countryside, streaming with rain, or cloaked in rolling clouds and sluggish mists; a place of dim hotels, lit with vast expense of gas, where one looked out on crowds moving ceaselessly with bowed heads over dirty, wet pavements, through narrow, storm-dark streets. And then there was one day that was like night,—wet, steaming, blankety night. . . . She remembered England for years afterward as the place where they bought mackintoshes, and overshoes and umbrellas.

But after that came “the pleasant land of France.” As they rode down from Boulogne to Paris, the countryside reached out to her, flung kisses,—and something in her heart began to sing. If she had

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been older, she would have wondered what dim strains in her blood were coming to their own in instant response and happiness. But now all she knew was that she wanted to run into the cozy houses, pat affectionately those people in the lanes and byways, and scramble through old riotous walled gardens and hedges.

II

OBVIOUSLY, for a child scarcely seven it would be impossible to realize the exquisite nature of the new surroundings in which tiny Margarita Gresham was to be bestowed. Mr. Snowden was the explanation of that, but even he didn't understand. Generations of culture had made him what he was; and with him the love of the beautiful was an instinct, almost a vice. France was an old sweetheart of his; Paris the city of his dreaming. In the fine old house, so, despite its somewhat narrower proportions, reminiscent of a Venetian palace, where they came to live, the Princess wandered through rooms dark and soft with luxurious furnishings. There was a drawing-room, too, with the pearl-like, airy lighting and the delicate furniture of a Louis Quinze salon, and a library in which just to sit down was "an education." She slipped on glass-like floors of parquetry, and took refuge on silken Persian islands in the midst of the glare, or felt her feet sink softly into the luxury of rich carpets. The house was part of Mr. Snowden's

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dream: he secretly hoped that he might spend the remainder of his life in it.

It fronted on a park with iron palings, but not like the oh-so-tiny one in New York. There were trees, like a small forest, and formal borders. One nosed along banks of flowering shrubs and came upon fountains incessantly playing bright waters into pretty basins. One walked on paths of snow-white pebbles and watched swans moving in and out among exotic plants, or saw red-gold fishes dart in the clear water. There were infinite pleasant people, and pretty nurse-maids with perambulators, and babies, and trailing children—fat, rosy, curly-haired children, with pinky calves to their round little legs. And it was all far removed from the faubourgs, or even the dust and bustle of the quays; but from the high windows of the new home one could look down on the chimneys and towers of the city, mistily rose-color and gold in the morning, or red with the sunset's rays.

It was all like wonderful pictures at first; but by-and-by she began to live in them . . . and afterward they were home.

And the people who were to be their friends!—They were a charmed and charming circle—orchids of the human kind, whose feet never touched the common earth, who drew their sustenance from the air about them,—Americans of old families and great wealth who craved the rare atmosphere of the heart

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of France, gladly suffering exile that they might breathe it; English people, a shifting throng, forever leaving cloudy England, and forever going back; wanderers from every European land domiciled for shorter or longer periods; but all people of an infinitely sensitive refinement, and all drawn by a common love of beautiful France. And what sights they were for a street-child's eyes! Ladies who moved like shadows with the slightest silken rustle, incredible compounds of sounds scarcely heard, of perfumes scarcely detected, who conversed in soft, musical speech, who smiled with an infinite gentleness and sweetness, and rustled by again, going; leaving a little hollow-eyed child wondering if their delicate complexions, their pretty hair, their crispy silks, would bear touching. They vanished into shining coaches, some with pretty escutcheons on the door; they were whisked away by marvelous horses, with real enough (and stern enough) drivers in plum-color, in blue and laced liveries, and footmen up behind. And then the gentlemen who fitted with these ladies! Square-shouldered gentlemen of military training; tall, elderly gentlemen of baronial pride; statuesque Englishmen with vague eyes; shock-headed French gentlemen with glaring goggles and big, musical voices—geniuses, poets, painters, mild old philosophers, academicians—Mr. Snowden's intimates. . . . She was to hear many great names, and gaze into the eyes of people the

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common world may not look upon, *and*—! She was to look in vain for the thing she sought.

She was to go to school, too, in a school kept by an English lady, with a French mam'selle, and babble French and English, in curious alternation, with other little tots, and wonder why Mam'selle made those funny noises in her nose, and learn to say: "*Je suis Americaine*," "*Je ne comprends pas*," and many other curious things. And there was to be an engaging cabman named Hippolyte at the door every morning, and Pompey was to bring her, or Philomène, her mother's maid. . . . There was to be no more of the old straying around corners to consort with queer bookmen or other strange folk.

I should be tempted now to say that childhood's heart responds quickly, almost instantly, to the surroundings in which it finds itself, were it not that I remember Margarita, whose nature ran too deep. It is true, however. Even with her, homesickness broke down after a while—its attacks less frequent, less intense. She thought of Mamma K., but when she did she fled into her mother's arms, and Angelina Kernochan became a dark and querulous figure in a dream; and even Otto, her counterpart, shrank into the shadows, where he remained for the Princess nothing more than a dull heartache. She surrendered to the new luxury. . . . It was all very beautiful, and she drank it in through eyes and ears,

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through skin and toes and finger-tips. Lucille Snowden loved it all; it was the dream that she and George had dreamed in the old days—helplessly,—and now it had come true, only larger and richer than she could have believed. And her little child was fitted by an exquisite longing born in her baby breast to love it too. It was the atmosphere of subtle and lovely things, of rare souls and fine natures, of gentle thoughts, and if it was not the land of Romance itself, it lay so close that the very winds blew spices across its borders.

In her subtler nature, however, the child was a constant source of mild anxiety to Mrs. Snowden, and even to her adoptive father, who loved her in a quite amused and tender way.

"I do so want to see those circles vanish from her eyes," said Mrs. Snowden; "to see her forget herself. My own life is so utterly happy!—and she is like a dark remonstrance on the border of my happiness—as if somehow I had done something wrong. Oh, I know it is only a morbid fancy!"—and she brushed the shadow from before her eyes, smiling back at her husband her new-found youth and trustfulness.

"I suspect we shall have to remember," Mr. Snowden answered, "what a long way it is from her old life to this, and how suddenly the leap has been made. Time is our ally. And good care and nour-

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ishment will give her the strength that she has been denied."

"Love, too," nodded Mrs. Snowden. "The great nourisher, the great healer. But, do you know, sometimes I have an uneasy feeling that it runs deeper than that,—as if we had plucked her up, like a tender plant, that could only thrive in that rotten soil, and had somehow—injured the roots,—as though she would never do well anywhere else,—as though I, who love her with such a passionate longing, could never quite replace that—homely creature—that fed her baby lips. Oh, you don't know—you could never understand, of course! But to wash her little baby body, and have her grow into me day by day—that—that is gone."

Mr. Snowden blushed slightly despite his smile, and flirted his watch-chain..

"A good deal of that," he said, "I feel is purely psychologic. It is all so—about the child's rootage. She may suffer from transplanting, for a time. But she'll get over it. Surely there is nothing in the street-soil of New York to feed a nature like hers. She is delicate, sensitive, imaginative. Think what France will do for such a spirit! And as for your own deep feelings about her, they only show how sweet and true a mother you are."

Mrs. Snowden nodded dreamily, happily, drinking the pleasant narcotic of his words. She had spoken truly; she was so utterly happy. It was an

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added beauty in a creature of faery loveliness. At such times she was quite radiant.

"But," she went on, "there was that man back there,—that book-seller. I wonder at him, and the marvelous hold he got upon her. Sometimes when I look into her eyes, so deep and dark, I think that she will never forget. She must have quite adored him, in her childish way. And the worst is, she expects to find him over here, you know—somewhere, some time. I wish I were brave enough to tell her. . . . And then there was that fantastic tale he told her, about the Prince of Nevercome and his Kingdom." Her pretty brows darkened for an instance. "Of course, it was sheer rubbish. And yet—and yet—"

"And yet what?"

"And yet there was something true in it."

Mr. Snowden puckered his face in a deprecatory look. "The fellow was a radical," he said, "and like all of his sort he was idealistic in a kind of wild, unshorn way. And yet he meant kindly. He was a curious combination of gentle manners and revolutionary ideas . . . I think I told you that he left Germany because he was willing to dynamite the government, but not to join the army?"

III

MOTHER knew. Some deep process of divination, that would scorn to be told, knew, and knew truly, and knew all, but couldn't understand. Something had happened to her baby, —something that made her eyes big, and dark, and wondering, often sadly. Something deep. Something mysterious. And, despite Mr. Snowden's optimistic words, she feared that the child would never get over it.

The great French physician to whom she took her sat the child on his knee and studied her with smiling eyes through his gold-rimmed glasses. Why were French gentlemen—most of them—so hairy? the Princess wondered. But their eyes overflowed with sentiment and merriment, and their voices were always so big and yet gentle! And his big hands were so gentle, too!

“But I see absolutely nothing the matter with her, Madame,” he said. “A delicate mold, yes; a little under-nourished, perhaps; a rather serious child, but that (pardon, Madame!) is a characteristic of your very interesting country. But,—on the whole, perfectly healthy, and a very sweet little maid indeed.

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My prescription is: Sunlight and air; play, entertainment, in judicious proportions; music, books, study, in minute additions. Simply that, and nothing more."

And certainly Margarita, after the first few weeks of her new life, did more and more respond to the life about her. Many of her little new friends were quite charming. They were children who went in carriages with governesses to the Jardin du Roi, to the Tuileries Gardens and the Luxembourg, to the pantomimes and the maneuvers, and to visit the famous buildings of Paris; and often they carried her off with them. School came to be delightful. And there were so many pretty children's parties in the English and American colonies. And then, there was her own quite beautiful park, where she went hand in hand with old black Pompey to watch the red-gold fishes dart, to try out her newest French on the smiling old soldier with white string mustaches and the Cross of the Legion not hidden on his rusty waistcoat. He was a merry old gentleman, it seemed, always sitting on the same bench, and always eager to catch and hold her slender hand a moment.

Quite naïvely her heart opened to every one who cared. She was not aware that they were lords and ladies, or concierges, or nurse-maids, as the case might be. She only knew whether they were friends, and that she knew quite intuitively and instantly. And for every new friend her heart leaped into a



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new happiness. It seemed so much like living. Her eyes were losing their hollow look, her cheeks wore the faintest marblings of carmine, her hands no longer felt so pitiful to those who clasped them, and the pipe-stem legs were things of the past.

Only occasionally did the old haunting memories return, and then usually through no motion of her own. For instance, that afternoon when two English ladies called. There was a wooing about people who spoke one's own language that made little girls rather willing to slip into the room where they were, or linger in the hallway. They detected her presence before Mrs. Snowden came down, and one of them—she was such a soft, appealing, motherly kind of lady! reached out a delicately-gloved hand and asked Margarita to come. Her smile was so inviting! The other was older, and slender, and very black, and very crisp, and sat up like a vinegar cruet in a very stiff chair. She seemed to prefer it so. The younger woman, who was merely a companion to the lady in black, was free to talk to little children.

"And do you like this strange, new land of France?" the lady asked.

"I like it very much," Margarita replied. "It is very beautiful." And then, because the lady had such understanding eyes, she went on: "but I am very fond of my own land, too. I want to go back to New York some day."

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The elder lady seemed affronted by so strange a sentiment. But the younger went on:

"Ah, no doubt. You miss the little friends you left behind."

"They were grown up," Margarita replied quite simply, "all except Mattie, and Bridget, and Tim. Mamma K.—she was my mother for six years, you know; and Miss Breen, and Otto." There was an embarrassed silence then, for the ladies, scenting revelations, did not dare remark.

"And then Otto came over here," the child went on, "at least somewhere beyond the blue sea. And I am always looking for him, though it seems such a big country. But some day I shall find him."

"Ah, indeed." The lady had laid her arm very lightly about the child and gathered her to her. "Won't you tell me about Otto?"

On the instant, something pricked the Princess. She could not be sure that the lady, for all her understanding eyes, was a believer. But what could she do but tell her about the Prince and his calling? She slipped away, then, thinking she heard her mother coming. They supposed her gone, but she only stood behind a curtain wondering if she might venture back.

"A strange, wistful little thing," she heard the younger lady remark.

"Rather underfed, I should think," the other answered.

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"And what a queer story to tell a child!" There was a trace of amusement, a touch of revulsion, in the remark.

"Weird," said the stiff lady. "Unwholesome. Morbid."

The Princess did not understand these remarks wholly, but she knew the tones in which they were uttered. She hid her face in the curtain a moment, ashamed. Then, for her mother was really coming, she fled.

By littles she began to understand that there was something about Otto and the story of the Kingdom that made people look askance. Even her own mother acted oddly, embarrassed, about it. She began to think that it must be a secret which she must keep until the end of the world, for it seemed there was no one who really liked to hear it.

But deep in her heart the eternal quest went on. Whether she walked in the park, or drove into the city, whether to church or to school, her little eager eyes scanned every face, and whether she knew it or not, she was still searching for one face in all the world—the face of Otto. The singular distinction of setting her loyal soul free from its quest waited for the young gentleman of the flame-like hair and the peach-blow complexion.

From the altitude of his four superior years, Master Paul continued to look down upon the Princess. Proudly as his father handed Mrs. Snowden

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about, and much as he himself admired her in a purely pictorial way, he still regarded her as something of an interloper; and as for the small creature who trailed in her skirts, keeping usually well to leeward—! He might have regarded her with scorn, but she was too tiny, too pitiful for that. Moreover, even in these youthful years, Master Paul was dimly aware how very much he owed to himself. He was built of sound stuff: his heart was good, and there was tremendous vigor in him. And back of the barbaric boyhood there was the accreted tradition of generations of gentlemen. He might be cruel, but it must be in a proud, exalted way.

"Mouse!" he said one day, when they nearly collided in a hallway, the Princess turning and fleeing to the shelter of a grand piano, from which comparative security she regarded him with timid eyes, and waited for him to flash past.

Instantly he knew that he had blundered. He had meant the word to be rather royal, good-naturedly condescending, with the merest delicate flavor of sarcasm. Instead, he realized that it was cheap, flat and insulting. (And yet the strangest thing about it was that she was very like a little mouse, so tiny, so tense, and staring with dark, helpless, beady eyes.)

"Hang it!" said he, impetuously, while a real blush heightened his natural color. "Don't forget to tell your mother that I called you 'Mouse'!"

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Then he rushed on. Already he could hear Mrs. Snowden's mild "Why, Paul!—" and his father's flushed but quiet "I'm ashamed of you, sir!"

Which only showed how little he knew the Princess. Things that hurt badly, and things that gave her keenest joy, some instinct taught her to bury in her heart—only forever thinking, forever looking, forever trying to understand. And though Master Paul came to luncheon looking very bold and nonchalant, and though his heart beat rather erratically, he heard nothing of his "mouse." And many days passed before he realized that he never would, nor of any other curt or unpleasant thing he had said to her. Which, as the months went by, more and more secretly irritated him. Occasionally after that, just to show that he must have been right that first time, he addressed her, with some kindness, as "Mousie." Which odd little Margarita accepted as in some sort an apology.

But he was a very superior boy indeed. All of his father's intellectual pride was in him, only waiting to be supplied with the stuff of knowledge; and that came fast. French was a mere pastime. He acquired the street language, and to a quite wonderful degree the accent, in a month, and he was deep into the lighter classics within his first year. In the school where he went, no other boy so consumed literature, gobbled paradigms, chanted irregulars, toyed with axioms as a lively young kitten

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with a mouse—or rushed more wildly for the wardrobe when closing-bell rang. There were young "Honorable" in that school, princelings from Russia and Persia, French lads of parts, American boys who might be supposed to bubble with their everlasting sunshine,—but there was only one Paul Snowden.

As time wore on the boy's mind, to a quite unusual degree, took on a philosophical cast. Other boys understood what evolution was and talked about it as some kind of an affair between monkeys, with which a man named Darwin had had a great deal to do. They canvassed its lore with profound interest, if not understanding. But Paul Snowden *sensed* things first, and filled in the mortar and rubble of knowledge afterward. All his life he was like that. There can be no doubt that he condensed (so to speak) out of his first eager studies in science a rather ugly mud of materialism, which sat ill on a boy's heart. But he did not know that; he was absorbed in the pursuit of knowledge, and the barbaric young blood of his youth carried him torrentially forward. It was only now and then that the strange hatefulness of the thing showed.

It must have been in the third year of their residence in Paris, he being as much as fourteen and the Princess ten, that he took her one warm, sweet day, to the Tuileries gardens. They were not often together like that; but he had days of melting gen-

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erosity, when he was quite noble to the little new sister (and she was quite sweet and happy in it). They had wandered through the Louvre together, chiefly in the gallery of moderns, and now they had come to sit in the sunshine for a moment. They were walking down an allée together, she like a little white butterfly in the alternating light and shade. And suddenly—she was gone!

He saw her fluttering away over the lawns on feet of air. He wondered what new absurdity had seized her; but he was much too dignified to run after. Instead, he sank onto the nearest bench and waited. . . . It was no brief moment, but presently she came back, walking dejectedly, and with a sad, far-away, crestfallen look. All the butterfly quality was gone.

"I say, but that's a new one," he blurted, with wide eyes. "What d'ye call it?" But she made no other answer than to slip into the seat beside him, covering her face with her hands.

"Lost your tongue?" he inquired testily, "and chasing after it?"

"Oh, please don't," she said, "I thought it was an old, old friend. I was so sure . . . and,—and I flew! And when I ran around in front of him, I saw that he was horrid—not my friend at all; and he made the most hideous eyes at me. Oh,—I want to forget!"

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The boy softened. "Tell me about your friend," he said more gently.

She had never mentioned Otto to him, but the mere suggestion of sympathy from this new quarter was so beguiling, she went on to tell him. She spoke apologetically now. She was growing older. Unfaith was getting a hold on her. Already she looked back with some commiseration, possibly a shade of amusement, on the little thing she had been. And when she came to that part about the Prince and the Kingdom, she spoke with diffidence, anticipating his superior smile. She was not prepared, however, for the cynical, boisterous laughter her tale evoked.

"Isn't that delicious nonsense!" he exploded. "The fellow must have been a Capucin in disguise. Why, see here," he said, growing suddenly very serious, "there isn't any 'blue rim of the world.' Don't you know that? Consequently, there can't be anything beyond it. What he meant was simply the haze on the horizon. But the horizon itself is only due to the curvature of the earth. And as for the haze, it's nothing but air, you know, and moisture. The sun draws moisture out of the earth, and it makes a kind of veil. Then, all air looks blue, when you see enough of it, because of the particles of dust that are always floating in it. Don't they teach you things like that in your school? You're not going to grow up a *perfect* ignoramus, I hope?"

"Yes, I know—" admitted the Princess shame-

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facedly. "But I *liked* to believe it. I didn't want to believe anything else——" Here a dry sob choked her. "But,—but even if I don't believe that,—there's Otto. He was real enough. And he's over here somewhere, you know. It's right to be true to one's old friends, isn't it?"

For answer, Paul gave her a withering, sardonic leer, quite hideous in one of his years, and pressed on with the abandon of an anointed apostle of sheer truth.

"D'you mean to say you didn't see through that either? Oh, my!—why, the fellow's *dead!* That's all that means. You said he had this cough. It's tuberculosis,—there isn't any cure; at least, not much. You were a little kid, and he didn't want to tell you right out, for fear you'd cry. So he fooled you. That's all."

For Master Paul it might have been "all," at least, for that particular moment. But for the Princess it wasn't. Something swept over her like a tidal wave, drowning her. She felt her spine stiffen bravely, as it always did. Things were terribly dark and cold for a moment, and sickness smote at her heart. . . . Then came the swift reaction, and tears, torrential, wild, drenching her face, her hands, her 'kerchief, her pretty frock, until they left her utterly weakened, blenched and helpless.

"There, there," said the boy, amazed at what he had done. "Don't make a ninny of yourself—at

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least, not here. He's been dead a long time, hasn't he?"

It had been part of his gallant idea to take her to lunch under one of the awnings on the Boulevards, but now he looked down on her ruefully. She was the most sorrowfully tear-streaked and bedraggled butterfly that ever danced through alternating light and shade.

"You're not fit to be seen," he said calmly. "We can go the side gate, and I'll run and fetch a cab."



IV

SHE did not hate him, however. She had never gotten her feet squarely enough planted in this world to enable her to compass such a *push* of the spirit. What would have been, ideally, a vigorous and bitter resentment, only turned to more wondering, and reacted on her always delicate frame. And then—well, we never know how weird life can be until the chap who has taken away our appetite for a week turns a bland, good-natured eye upon us and intimates that his own stomach is growling furiously, and he'd be obliged if we could help him to coffee and a sandwich.

The immediate outcome of that unhappy hey-day in the Tuileries escaped the gentle eyes of Mrs. Snowden. Impulsive, warm-hearted Philomène hid the dress, and Master Paul kept any little thing he may have known to himself. But nothing could hide the pack of ravening wolves that fed on the Princess's small heart. Her brave little world was gone-to-smash, and that's all there was of it. There was illness. She still came courageously to the table, but the thought of food revolted her. Also, she did not

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dare look at Master Paul lest her eyes should betray his complicity. For that young gentleman had managed to conceal his feelings, such as they were, under a most amazing display of cravats. Worst was, the illness was of an exceedingly baffling nature, and the patient herself seemed unable to throw any light upon it. It was not until she was in bed, and flushed with fever, that Mrs. Snowden succeeded in getting at the heart of her sorrow.

"Something's making my darling ill,—something that's on her mind," the lady reiterated for the hundredth time. "Doesn't she know how dearly Mother loves her, and how Mother *must* know?"

If the eyes with which she looked down upon the sufferer had been less beautiful she might never have learned, for the little hungry soul in the bed was infinitely older than the radiant creature who bent above her. But the child loved beauty, and she yielded her secret up as if it had been a swan-song, exquisitely drawn from her. She did not feel that Mrs. Snowden would understand, or ever could.

"I think it must be because I am growing older," she said, laying one small hand on her mother's. "You see, as we get older, we learn that so many things aren't so,—that we liked to believe, I mean. When I was little I liked to believe that there was another country where everything was sweet, and right, and true,—and that it was only a step away." She paused, forcing a smile of an infinite wan beauty,

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but so *old*,—so wonderfully old and courageous, into her lips. It was as if already she were pitying the creature so compounded of sunlight and fragrance and fragility who was her mother—trying to soften for her the asperities of realization.

"You know," she went on, "Otto and I used to talk about that. And it all seemed so real, because I could *see* the blue rim of the world, and it was *just over there!* But there isn't any blue rim of the world, you know," she went on, dashing a tear from her eye. "It's only mist that the sun makes when it draws water out of the earth . . . and it lies along the horizon, you know . . . and the horizon's only a line that shows the curvature of the earth. I think I knew it, in a way, when we were coming across in the ship. But I was so little then, and I didn't really want to know."

"Yes, but the country is real for all that," Mrs. Snowden insisted prettily. "It's the country of good deeds, of kind hearts, of sweet natures. And we're in it right now," she pursued insistently. "This beautiful land of France, this lovely city; all these dear boys and girls we play with day by day,—and the—and the books, and the pictures, and the dollies, and such a good Daddy, and a big brother, and—and . . . oh, we mustn't forget, a *mother*—!" Then, for some inexplicable reason, she burst into golden tears and buried her head beside the child—tears in the midst of which came her tinkling laugh.

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How she had missed, or why, Mrs. Snowden could never know. But the eyes with which the Princess met her uplifted face were wonderfully old and calm. And the pitying look, or the hunger, were not gone.

"Then there was Otto," the child went on quite levelly. "Do you know, I think he must have died!"

"Why, child!" cried Mrs. Snowden, suddenly realizing the situation. "What put such a thought into your head?"

"You know he was very sick," Margarita went on. "I was too little then to understand. But I know now. He had tuberculosis. There's no cure, you know,—at least, not much——"

They had reached the place where words were no longer necessary. Wrapped in each other's arms they swung out into space. The mother knew now—knew how tender, how loyal, how deep was the little heart that beat next her own—knew that the delicate thing was all but crushed for a love that she had treasured unbroken through those years—began to know how the child had yearned, and waited, and watched, with eyes that never were weary, for the soul that she loved above all others. And the child, because she had put her trouble in a form of words, and because the fountain of her tears had burst, felt soothed and comforted.

Her amendment, slow as it was, began that day.

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IT would be exceedingly unjust to Master Paul Snowden, however, to imply that in all this he felt nothing. When he heard the Princess's case outlined to his father, over the dinner-table,

"Poor little kid!" he said. "I say, Pater, it's a rotten world for a kid to be born into, isn't it? We ought to be born out of Jove's helmet, full-grown and full-armored, like Minerva. We ought to be born fighting-men; not little innocent babies, eh?"

Daily during her illness he would burst into the sickroom and stand grinning down at her. He still called her "Mousie," but now with the utmost kindness. Sometimes he patted her cheeks and called her "Sis," which made her heart leap warm with gratitude.

It was rather mysterious, this tumultuous new kindness of his. She couldn't understand, for instance, why he called her "a brick," and said she was made of the stuff heroes are made of. She didn't feel in the least like a hero. But it was all very comforting, and disarming, and she yielded to the luxury of it. Moreover, she knew how hard it was for him to appear sympathetic, and she thought it very wonderful, very handsome in him to try.

"No temperature to-day?" he said, when at length she had grown strong enough to sit up and read. "Good! And chicken-broth," he went on, sniffing over the tray that stood at her bedside, "and junket! My-oh-my! You'll be eating like an ostrich before

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the week's out. 'And then,' he added quizzically, "you'll be in fine shape for the party at General De Murelle's. The invitations are out. Ours came this last post."

It was a pleasant enough picture that he set dancing before her eyes. She could see the General's palatial house in the Bois, with its armorial gateway and walled garden. There would be marquees and awnings spread on the sweet, smooth lawns. There would be aristocratic little maids like butterflies among its many flowers. There would be handsome boys,—dark-eyed and clever, fair-haired and laughing. There would be ices and dainty cakes somewhere in the shade. And the sun would deign to flood it all with warm, soft light. . . . But those were wistful eyes she turned toward her window, now, with the picture still dancing in them. Was there, with all its glow and charm, the saddest little feeling that she must make the most of these things henceforth, for there was nothing more?

NEVERTHELESS, it was at that party, enacted very much as she had imagined it two weeks later, that the Princess was to be made quite happy beyond words. She was to be led into the holy-of-holies of Paul Snowden's heart, and a new and altogether wonderful confidence was to grow up between them.

She had known something about it for a long time; but, being *such a little girl*, she had not been

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able to understand. Now, in the strength of her own overwhelming sorrow she was to be able to understand and to help him. She had heard them talk of love,—meaning some terrible, shy, half-painful thing that passed between little boys and girls—not quite so young as ten, however. But she could not have known before what an exquisite torture it could be, nor how it could get under a young gentleman's jacket and make him wiggle and twist like an eel on a spear. She could not have conceived a thing that would humble that tumultuous Paul, make his face flame to bursting with jealous, wounded pride, make him grovel with despair, and melt his stony heart to tears. She was to witness that amazing thing now for the first time. . . .

It had been a very pretty party indeed. Paul, in his flannels and blazer (it was almost his first adventure in the long trousers that English schoolboys wear so young) was so handsome that Margarita exulted in him. . . . Virginia Witherill, heiress presumptive to oil-wells in Ohio, and uncountable millions, was there. (But Paul had generously rated her millions sheer dross: it was only the rare creature herself that he adored,—a patrician elegancy but half suggested by a very perfect Grecian nose, an exquisite whiteness of brow and neck, 'round which flowed streams of lustrous black hair, and brown eyes in which a quite mature coquette lay dreaming.) . . . Halfway in the party the Princess caught sight

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of Paul's face, hateful, miserable, glaringly red, slinking down an unfrequented path, but she did not dare go to him. Instinctively she gathered the meaning of his distress; if she had not gathered it so, the heightened beauty of Miss Witherill, the ecstatic angle of her nose, would have told her. She knew that Miss Witherill was *not* being raised to 'that point of sublimity by the subservience of young Hop-pinton, son of a rich English widow, whose slave-like service she had deigned to receive, even though he was the next handsomest boy after Paul; but by the absurd torments of Master Paul himself, whose writhing misery, coupled with the worse misery of trying to appear unconcerned, she could observe in the merest sidelong glance. . . . Intuitively the Princess understood her fully, and disliked her cordially. A creature who could grow sublime on another's pain—! She wanted to run to Paul and tell him how false she was, how mean, and how proudly he must bear himself under such treachery. . . .

It might have been all very ludicrous if Master Paul could have been convinced of the element of humor in it; but he couldn't, and Margarita could not help him to a right perspective. They were in the library at home after the party, toward dusk. There could be no possible doubt that his boy's heart was wounded and flowing a dark stream there in the gloom. She could see his face burn darkly, and knew that he had cast away restraint. How she

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wanted to comfort him!—to soothe! And he paced the floor distractedly in his acute misery.

“But she was wonderful!” he burst out ecstatically.

“Yes; but I don’t like her,” the Princess said, taking too much for granted in the joy of this new intimacy.

“*Don’t like her!*” The boy stopped short, and in the waning light she could see his face half-mad, and bursting, and very strange. “*Don’t like her!* Pshaw! you must be crazy!”

This disgusted retort quite buried Margarita. Nevertheless, she did *not* like Virginia Witherill. She was not drawn to anybody, however beautiful, on whose face she did not find the high stamp of truth.

“She’s an angel!” exclaimed Paul, making the world-old mistake. “Whatever she does is *right!*” Then he stopped again in his distracted stumping. “But, look here, Margie” (he sometimes called her that in tender moments); “what I want to know is: Do you consider young Hoppinton really good-looking? I want your honest opinion. I know he isn’t as big as I am. And as for his mother’s money—what’s that! Besides, Virginia’s rich herself. I can’t for the life of me see how she could drop me for him.”

The Princess considered a moment. She wanted

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to be quite deliberate and satisfying in this important crisis.

"No," she said, flushing with loyal pride, "he isn't. His eyes are not alike. I consider he has a weak mouth. And as for his hair, and his complexion, they are nothing to yours! He isn't half as quick. And he isn't bright at all. I am quite sure that she doesn't love him."

"How do you know that?" Paul inquired eagerly.

"I don't think she loves anybody," the Princess replied with a shrewd finality.

He did not blurt out at her, as on the instant she had expected. Instead he sagged up against a bookcase, where he hung disconsolate. The Princess, if she had meant to hurt him, could not have driven home a shrewder dart, and his not speaking, crying out, meant that she had voiced his worst fears. No, Virginia Witherill did not really love anybody!—and yet his boy's heart was wholly surrendered to her. Wholly and shamefully broken there at her feet!

In the gathering dark the Princess crept close to him, where she could see his face.

"Why, Paul," she said, "you're almost crying."

It was true. His lip was wobbling drunkenly. A second more, and the storm broke. "She told me she loved me," he jerked out between his sobs, "—not two weeks ago."

The Princess snuggled up to him now and laid

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her head against his quaking ribs. She made a curious little moaning sound between cooing and crooning. It would have been so delicious thus to share his sorrows if he had not been so utterly miserable. But it was glorious to be his confidante, to be trusted like that, and to think that she could know and sympathetically understand such great things!

By which we who are interested may see that she was the same old Princess after all.

V

I THINK of the years that followed for Margarita as her hero years. They were the years which come in the life of men when the glamour of childish imaginings and faiths gives place to hard realizations, and in the grim storm, half-resentment, half-despair, everything goes, and the bleakness invades one's very soul, assailing even the foundations of despair. It is not given to many women, in their sheltered lives, where they always treasure some sweetness, so to realize. But because this faery child was so slight of mold, so deadly earnest, so helpless without her Kingdom and her Prince, why, it seemed just the right and inevitable outworking of the thing called irony that she should be cast away on the four winds of fate. Eleven, say, is an early age for a child to face sheer truth, alone (and every one must face it alone!); but it was inescapable,—partly because of her own terrible sincerity, partly because (as we have seen) of the ardent frankness of the young gentleman with the peach-blow complexion.

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How rich by comparison seemed those old New York days when the body indeed starved, but the soul battened on rich uplands! They were hungry days, but their hunger was nothing like this. As in those days, however, some brave thing within her met and grappled the lean mother-world, met and grappled the condensed-milk can and the soda-crackers; so now something held fast with a grimness which even the grim old world itself could not outvie. Naturally, her health suffered, but not her spirit. She did not grow hollow-eyed, but there was a deadly earnestness about her that made people vaguely uncomfortable in her presence. Incidentally, I think it was the end of her too-brief childhood. She no longer thought as a child, or spake as a child.

The old dreaming was gone. There were no more misty, purple lands. But it was the same Margarita. The challenge and the quest were the same. In reality nothing had changed but the angle of her search, and a child's heart bearing wounds. If she came back from a visit to the faubourgs consumed with burning questions about the poor and their poverty; if she taxed sweet-tempered and charitable ladies with queries as to why their charity never really eased the world's hurt; if she argued atrociously with Master Paul about the implications of evolution, and particularly about his pet idea that "those people don't *feel*, as we do; if they did, they'd

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struggle out of it and get somewhere,"—it was all the one oh-so-simple soul searching still for the Kingdom of Nevercome. And people thought her impertinent, or disagreeable, or a curious psychological phenomenon—not likely to live long, according to their several bents and capacities for insight.

Five years of Paris were come and sped. It was time for Master Paul to be in college in his homeland; it was time for Margarita to enter a girl's boarding-school and learn America. Then they were back in America. Summers they returned to Europe. There were two years more of French life, this time from the viewpoint of a country château. Then America again. It was Mr. Snowden's life they were leading, accommodated slightly to Paul's career, who, after a Harvard B. A. at nineteen, must spend a year or two at Oxford. It was not the kind of life in which one realizes anything except culture. Home, duty, civic obligations,—these were mere names. And as for Margarita's intense seeking, it was literally an empty misery of curious defeat. She should have been very happy in all this refined whim-chasing, but instead she was only bewildered,—with periods of intense unhappiness between-whiles.

There was one hour of bright ecstasy, however, on the first American return—not the first year, though. It was Easter vacation, and Margarita was home from her school in the Litchfield hills. It had taken a long time to trace Mamma K. It had been

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her chief thought in the few idle hours she had in New York. Tight as was the girdle of her new life, she had been down to the old brick house by the oh-so-tiny park. She had sat on the bench where her mother had found her, and been a little street-girl again, looking up at that wonderful shining creature. She had been into the old-book shop, and purchased a book, and silently worshiped. She had canvassed the neighborhood until she had found an old man who could give her information.

The Kernochans were near a little town up the river where bricks were made, and there one day the Princess burst in upon them. It was a shuddersome spot—a tiny, tottering four-room shack, some time painted slate-gray, teetering on the edge of a yellow clay-bank, with brickyards to view before and a jagged hill behind. She had come alone, for Mrs. Snowden had been content not to renew that passage from her memories in which Mrs. Kerno-chan figured most sharply.

"Yes?" asked the woman who appeared at the door.

She was so much older!—thinner, grayer, anxious-looking, furtive, as though life had become one long dread. Margarita may have shrunk from her a little.

"I am Margarita," the Princess said, rather hollowly.

"Margarita?" (still the questioning, unrelieved).

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"Yes. Don't you remember little *Ma-aggie*?"

At the sound of the bleat Mrs. Kernochan changed instantly:—a hoarse cry, like that of some prehistoric bird, echoed along the clay-banks. The shrunken rim of her eyes burned suddenly red. Her arms stretched wide in one awkward gesture, even her fingers spread wide, and her lean chest heaved. A burst of unutterable happiness fell like a glory on her homely face.

"Saints and angels!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my God! *Oh, my God!*" And if she had not buried the Princess in an overwhelming embrace she might have gone in a heap.

"Come and see Auntie, then," she said, when she had at last unwound herself. "And to think that you would come back to see us! Aunt Ma-aggie, here's someone come to see us now—*little Ma-aggie!*"

In the dim and woefully bare room they came to Grandma Dowd,—still sitting in a hard little chair beside a small window. She seemed shorter, heavier, more helpless than ever, only the smoky yellow collops and festoons of flesh had grown unspeakably dingy, and the eyes opened a slit with difficulty,—dull, dispassionate, almost reptilian.

"Oh-h," she grunted, and smeared her lip with her loose forefinger (the old trick!).

"She don't know you," Angie murmured. "I'll tell her all about you afterward, and she'll enjoy it. She's like that most of the time now. She's past

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eighty." Then, reverting to her own recognitions, the woman gave herself up shamelessly to the luxury of them.

"Oh, but you're so pretty!" she exclaimed. "Stand here in the sun and let me look at you. You're tall—I'd never have thought it;—at least, to what you was." She was down on one knee now, and the attitude was not unlike worship. She had caught the hem of the girl's dress and was sifting it through her fingers, an absurd rapture on her face. Almost it was beatific.

"Oh, how beautiful it is!" she exclaimed. "And the lace—Ah, but isn't that pretty!" She had caught a glimpse of the child's petticoat above her shoetops and she touched its exquisite edge tremblingly. She gathered a handful of the delicate stuff and crushed it between her fingers and let it go with a look of ecstasy. "Is it real Valenciennes? And your shoes!—"

"Oh, *don't*," pleaded Margarita, coloring painfully and drawing back. The woman's adoration hurt. She was dimly aware of the picture they made—the sunlight streaming on her bright dress, the dark figure there on her knees before her.

"I can send you lace like that, or a dress, or shoes. But they aren't me."

"Ah, dearie," yearned Mrs. Kernochan (and Margarita knew she had done her an injustice), "do

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you thing I'd look twice at those things if they weren't on you? You're all of a piece."

Margarita drew her to a chair. "Come and sit down, like a good soul," she said, "and tell me about all the old friends. Where is Papa Jim?"

"Oh, Lordy! And don't you know? Papa Jim's in heaven now, if prayin' will do any good. And he's never known the want of a mass. Ah, Ma-aggie," she went on, with a delicious familiarity, "my man was a good man, for all his weakness. He worked hard and steady, and he was good to me and the children. God knows, he was better than he looked. And in those last days, when he was so weak and helpless, there was never a word out of him! God rest his soul!"

They came to speak of the Kernochan children. "Tim is in New York," Mrs. Kernochan said. "He's got a job in an iron foundry. He's big and strong, and he can do day-labor. It was a friend of Jim's got him in—thinkin' in time he might get a chance to be a molder. It's a fine trade, that, but I dunno—Timmy's a good boy, Ma-aggie, but he's awful thick. He gets his dollar-and-a-quarter a day, but by the time he pays his board and has a dollar or two for spendin' money, there ain't much left. Still he sends me two or three dollars every few weeks."

Bridget, it seemed, was employed as dishwasher in a workingman's restaurant in a big town ten miles away. "The fares on the railroad cuts in like every-

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thing," Mrs. Kernochan concluded, "but she can't live away from home on four dollars a week. She gets home nights a little after nine, and is away again on the seven-o'clock."

"Mattie—he's quite a boy now. He runs errants for the superintendent down in the yards. He makes many a ten cents that way. And every ten cents he makes he brings and lays in my hand. Ah, he's a *good* boy, Mattie is. May he always stay so!"

It was an education for Margarita—a better education than she had been getting in her costly private schools—to hear this woman talk. Through the reiterated refrain: "He was good, but—"; through all the brave, desperate sadness of it, there was an undertone of optimism,—something was singing! It would be long before she could resolve this paradox; she felt no more now than the pleasant sting of reality. But it was better, oh, so much better! than all the refined self-seeking in which she had shared bewilderingly these last years. Was it, then, reality itself which sang? Were goodness, and hope, and all real joy but properties of the stony heart of things?

"And Miss Breen?" Margarita prompted eagerly.

"*Miss Breen!*" said Angie, displaying some ironical shock at the appellation. "Poor soul! I wish she was. No, you never knew anything about that. But we had always suspected. One night, sure enough, *he* appeared. He came to me in the base-

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ment, unbeknownst to her. His name was Cray, by the way. They'd lived in a western city. She'd a baby by him. And he was a drunken, gambling loafer. He didn't need to tell me, and he didn't. I could see that much. One day she turned the gas on and got into bed beside the baby. . . . When they got them out they had hard trouble to save her life, but the—but the baby was dead. . . . Of course, it was in all the papers out there, and when she got right again she come to New York, thinkin' she'd never see him any more, but all the time afraid she would. And she was right. He knew wherever she was she'd work hard, and he figured he'd always be able to get something out of her, because he could call her a murderer."

"How terrible!" shuddered Margarita, something clutching at her vitals. "And what did you do?"

"Do!!" shouted Angelina Kernochan, growing suddenly tall and terrible. "I grazed his head with a stove-lid; that's how far he got with me. It was just in the breaking-up, and Jim was too sick to lick him. But he got her. The last I heard was in the papers. She was arrested on the docks for attempting suicide again.

"And the old printer? Oh, yes: I remember him well enough. A girl I knew kept the house for two years after we went. He stayed there in his room. But he went from bad to worse. At the last

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she had to put' him out. God only knows where they drift to when they're like that. . . . And the Dutchman in the back rooms? Oh, yes. They left the next fall. They'd a son somewhere in the west, and he sent for them. It was the liquor there too, Ma-aggie. He was a' fine workman, and could make good money. I hope the son could get them out of it." She sighed and looked blankly a moment, then, "I wisht they'd pour all the stuff into a big black hole somewhere,—all the whiskey and beer, and stuff!—then take all the money that's been made out of it, and change it into silver dollars, and tie it in bags onto the feet of them that makes it, and drop them into the midst of it, and let them swim out if they could!! So help me God, I do!" she said.

It had grown late. Margarita rose to go. But Angelina Kernochan anticipated her movement with a biting of the lips, a sudden little movement trying to hold back a tear that was nevertheless too quick for her.

"You're going," she said. The words were indescribably hollow, tragical, final, like a little sob. "It's been seven years—I've been reckoning up while you were talking. Very likely I'll never see you again."

"Don't think of it that way," said the Princess, though in her heart the words roused a fearsome echo. "I was so little before; and I had those

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dreams to hold me up; and I didn't know, anyhow, what life means. I'm older now; at least I begin to know. I have hungered to come and see you. I shall come again. It won't be so long this time. They will let me travel alone more, you know."

They were poor words of comfort at best, and she felt a strange sense of their hollowness as she spoke. But Angie shook her head.

"It ain't likely," she said without a trace of bitterness, rather with an air of compassion. "You'll want to come, but you won't be able. Maybe it's best so. You are rich now, and we are poor. Why should you be made unhappy with our sorrows? Go on, dearie, into the light, where you belong. No, no, there's a great gulf fixed betwixt us, like the rich man and the poor man in the story."

"It isn't so!" Margarita made a brave smile, and crushed the good woman in a warm embrace. "It isn't so. It can't be so. So long as I live I shall fight against such a monstrous idea."

But still Angie Kernochan put the joy of it from her. "It wouldn't be right," she said, more to herself than to Margarita, and shaking her head sadly. "You'll be rich, and you'll be beautiful, and you'll ride on your horse, and come out in society, like the ladies we see in the magazines. And you'll marry a rich man. Don't think of us in our misery. We're used to it. Good-by, and" (with one after another ecstatic kiss) "God bless you."

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"Ah, no!" said Margarita, now more aroused and more distressed than the woman herself, as she caught Angie's thin arms pressing her away: "Listen: there's something more to tell you." And clasping her once more, she laid her lips against Angie's ear and whispered:

"You took me when I was a little weeny baby. You fed my baby lips. You soothed my crying. You gave me your love when you were tired and worried to death. You kept back nothing that you had. You see, I am not all fool; I know—a little. You are—my Mamma,—my Mamma K. You always will be. And some day I shall be free to come and go, and the first time I am free I will come to you. *Remember. Good-by!*"

The woman's mouth hung open like a Greek mask. A bluish color overspread her face. Her look was between terror and ecstasy. She could neither believe nor deny. And, leaving her like one transfixated in that attitude, Margarita fled.

VI

THAT blue-gray mask, tragically trembling, was not lightly imprinted in Margarita's memory, nor the gaunt figure framed in the narrow wood of the doorway, against the dim background of the squalid room they had just left. For years it was to linger there, in sunshine and in gloom, in despair and triumph—her own life symbolized. She could not for the moment shake off its poignant despair. It was truly a sorrowful picture, and in her heart were tears. But behind all that, in some quite beautiful way, it warmed her, quickened her, gathered and knit all the fine resolution and courage of her nature, until she glowed with happiness that rose like a ground-swell,—a happiness that something assured her was not merely momentary, though, indeed, in after days she lost it.

As the train followed the winding shoreline of the river homeward, she beheld a glory of sunset on its broad waters, a shining on distant hills, soft colors in the sky, trailing lights and pearl-hued gleamings in the river, that made it all a pageantry of fairy-

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land. On so slight a sign, she slipped back into the faith that was born in her,—the faith that Otto had visualized and interpreted for her, and lay, her head couched on the red cushion of the car-seat, dreaming. After all, it was true,—all gloriously true. *Just over there!*—just beyond the blue rim of the world, just beyond the sunset maybe, was the Kingdom. And in that moment when she had confessed the deep loyalty of her heart to Angie Kernochan the borders had slipped away, and the Prince had been very near. All that kept him back was Mrs. Kernochan's unfaith, and that had been so shattered! Mamma K. hung there by such a light thread,—bravely resisting, yet almost believing! And though no doubt she would grit her teeth, and summon her "Irish" to beat off all soft sentimentalities the instant after, she had left in Margarita a great joy and a beautiful promise. What right had Paul Snowden to gainsay these bright things of unreality? They only waited for someone to make them real. After all, people lived in sects, didn't they?—did what pleased them best, and then bolstered it up with an idea which they afterward called a philosophy. The Epicurean loved his wine, and invented a philosophy to explain his fondness. The cowardly stoic dreaded pain, and shaped all his thoughts and ways to deaden his sensibilities, that he might be unable to feel that which he feared. And if she chose love and all love cost, and was quite happy in

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it, why shouldn't she dream, and believe, and—and wait?

Of one thing she was quite sure. She did not need the immaculate gloves that lay in her lap, the beautiful hat she wore, the "real Valenciennes" lace—no, nor the bonbons and marshmallows at school, and a hundred other little pleasant things, one-half so much as she needed the vision of Mamma K. in her pitiful house smiling over a letter with money! It might be a long way, but she would win Mamma K. to believing. If the life-tangle were not so strange, so hampering; if hope did not hang on such odd contingencies, the time might come when she would lead Mamma K. clear out of the valley of the shadows and make her love her Kingdom and her Prince! Oh, how passionately she yearned for the things of her simple faith!

And then she fell to wondering about love and life. Would she some time know and love a man, and thrill to his touch, and through him come to the realization of her dream? She shuddered coldly at the thought. . . . Or would she some day earn her own living—such an ample living that the dream would fall into her lap like golden apples of Hesperides? . . . But both of these were sobering, saddening thoughts.

As she left the ferry-house and called a cabby from his stand near by, a bitter wind out of the early April night struck her harshly, feeling its way to

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the bone. She was conscious of being weary and defenseless, aware that her cheeks were burning with a hectic flush, that she was overwrought and excited. In some dim way she realized that this was the price of her dreaming,—that there was some swift and jealous reaction on her body; but nothing could dim the bright transport of that afternoon! It had restored the old happiness of the bookshop days. Otto was sitting near once more. . . . She could see the little smiles twinkle and stop, twinkle and stop, all over his gentle face. . . . She could hear the quiet pleasantness of his voice. . . . And once more she could believe to her heart's content.

Mrs. Snowden listened that night with melting eyes while Margarita told of her visit. Then, impulsively, she brought from a bureau drawer the check for her month's allowance.

"Poor, dear soul! You must send her that," she said. Then, in answer to Margarita's questioning eyes: "I can manage somehow. I have something left over from last month. I can piece two months together some way." After which, it is not unjust to Mrs. Snowden to say, she brushed her tear away and quite forgot Angelina Kernochan.

THEREAFTER Mrs. Kernochan did indeed receive letters from her weanling, and the folded bills and postal orders they contained were rich surprises to

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the poor woman in the clay-banks, often unspeakably weary after a day's washing.

"Heaven must be like this," she would say, in the excess of her emotion.

Scarcely a month passed without a letter and some real assistance from her "rich baby," as she liked to call her,—first home money-orders, then foreign ones, with letters strangely marked, on such thin, crinkly paper! from France, with occasional odd ones from other lands where her baby was journeying. There were times when the thought of this little child of hers afar, loving her and calling her "Mamma,"—when the thought of her sure love trembled into tears, and she felt as helpless, as uncertain, with a sense of some great good thing about to happen, as she had on that afternoon when the child kissed her and left her standing in the door.

But for the Princess there was no such joy in the letters as she could have wished. It was somebody else's money she was giving away; somebody else's money she was living on. It made her feel her helplessness. She grew to wonder why she wasn't a pauper,—what distinguished her from one; she, who would have taken up her work anywhere in life, even in a box-factory if fate had led her there, with so brave a heart. Would the time ever come when she could give, not somebody else's money, nor, indeed, money at all, but *herself?* What she dreamed of was of faces lit with a wondrous light,

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like Miss Breen's, like Mamma K.'s when she stooped to examine her pretty dress that day; of eyes softened with a marvelous haze, hearts visibly opening to love and hope and courage—things not of this earth at all. And *this sort of thing* brought with it a contemptible, smug satisfaction, like that of the man who had said (perhaps with truth) : "I bestow the half of all my goods to feed the poor." She felt as common as any of the wealthy women with whom she was so much thrown, with their "charity-lists."

And how much rather than send letters would she have gone herself! But who could say that Mamma K. was not right?—that it was better they should not meet. If there could never be a sounder basis for the Princess's dreaming, it could mean nothing but pain to either of them.

VII

IS it not strange that in all these years this simple child, with her big, serious eyes and her brave, simple faith, should come upon but one other soul that quite simply and naturally understood her, and cared enough for her strangely visionary nature to talk to her openly and easily about the things it loved?

"Ah, Miss Margie," he would say, shaking his head and flicking the ash from his perennial cigarette, "you've chosen a rough path for your small feet,—the path of the dreamer—celestial cities, and all that kind of thing. Better be an old bounder like me. Better cultivate your *beaux yeux* like the ladies on the hill,—and live at ease. Still," he added, "you're a plucky little thing. I admire you,—'fore God, I do!"

It was at the shabby little beach in Brittany which Mr. Snowden had chosen for its air of neglect and quietude that last summer in France. The rusty hotel and casino were not likely to bring a crowd of

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fashionables. In the billiard-room one stormy evening the distinguished novelist met Harry Guex and was so interested in him as to invite him to dine with his family. Not even the Pied Piper of Hamelin could have been more oddly fascinating. He called himself an adventurer, a vagabond, and on the face of him nobody would dispute the claim. He was tall, big-boned and thin; he was beginning to be old—somewhere past fifty. He was rough as an old tower, and his skin had the flaky dry red of battered bricks. He spoke with a harsh burr, the language of the wanderer. His eyes, not often seen to the full, were a pale gray-blue, his pale red hair exceedingly thin. He had lived on sea as on the land, pierced tropical forests, explored fabled mountains, fought with men and beasts, and he left no doubt in anybody's mind that he had done it all with bare hands. For all that, he set the entire cosmopolitan population of the tiny resort agog, without the slightest effort. . . . Something there was about him that the military man never loses. A note of distinction appeared at unexpected moments in his speech, which he was at pains immediately to cover up with some queer brusquerie.

Late one evening in the smoking-room, when a genial freedom prevailed, some one taxed him with the oddity of his name.

"A Britisher's name," he said, "is whatever his bootmaker chooses to call him—most English names

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are made that way. The British tradesman calls me Gwecks, and Gwecks I am. The name is French,—of course. I suspect it used to be *Gueux*, but time has softened the asperities of that sublime title."

At another time, a lady suggested that there ought to be a title of some sort with his name, but he bowed with an absurd deference, and remarked: "Plain Harry Guex, ma'am, by the grace of God, master of himself—at times! That's all there is of me."

"Oh, no!" the lady insisted coyly.

"Leftenant, then, if you insist, my dear madam. But pray let it be a profound secret between us two. You see, I am archly incognito."

He had unearthed a rusty dinner-jacket that night he ate with the Snowdens, in which he looked, if possible, more disheveled than in his ill-kept tweeds. But the quality of his mind was such that he never seemed ordinary. And his attitude toward women (he treated even the humblest as though she were a creature of romance and reverence) distinguished him at once.

It was when they had withdrawn into a neighboring parlor, and Margarita had seated herself at the great old piano, playing a bar or two, that he sauntered up and chose a song from the well-worn folios which strewed its top. It was Labouchére's "*O quel Heureux*," and Margarita played its opening measure softly. Then he sang, in a big, rich baritone that thrilled the room.

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She was not so charmed by his voice as by his manner. She could see that he was singing with a tender perception. It was so odd a revelation . . . and his voice broke a little in spots.

"Shocking bad taste," he whispered softly, as he closed the folio. "I should have known better. I did much better driving Kaffirs at Kimberley."

That he should care at all for a girl of eighteen, and such an unusual one as Margarita, was not the least of his oddities. But she met him frequently on the beach mornings, and always he greeted her with pleasure, and fell in with her. He had a disconcerting way of looking deep into her brown eyes with his rather indeterminate gray ones, as if to say: "Are you really what I thought you were the last time I glanced at you?" Then they would wander along the beach, clamber up the stark headlands that encircled it, and settle in some sea-mew's haunt where the sun was warm and there was no sound but the hum of the breeze and the softened lisp of surf.

"There's something about it—" he said, waving a hand toward the far reaches of water, stretching out in zones of steel-blue and gray, softer and ever softer, to the far horizon. She understood the tones rather than the words.

"Yes, there's something about it—" she answered.
"An air."

"An air," he repeated gently.

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"As if there were another world stooping to touch our own,—a world where all the better things are true. A world without sorrow." Then, because he did not instantly reply, she went on: "But you wouldn't care, you wouldn't understand. Yours has been such a practical life!"

"Don't I, though?" Strange!—this man of fifty spoke as gently, as sympathetically, as interestedly, as—Otto. "It's your world, isn't it? I can see that, though my old eyes have been somewhat dimmed by gun-smoke and tropical fevers and suchlike things. Do you know, sometimes I think I've been fleeing it all my life? You'd never think, now, that I'd visions when I was young? I was an exceedingly romantic youth——"

He did not speak for some moments. Then he went on: "Naturally, you're wondering whether I broke my heart back there,—somebody's two eyes had 'slain me sorely,' eh? But, no; it was only the beast in me. *Only the beast in me,*" he repeated softly. "You see what I am. It had to come out. But the other was there——"

He paused, and in the interval Margarita's voice came faintly, remonstrating:

"*Is* there," she said. But he seemed not to hear. "I expect that doesn't do any good, Miss Maggie," he said. "I burnt my bridges long ago. I can still look and wonder, but, like Moses on Nebo,

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I may not enter it. I 'took the cash and let the credit go.' "

He spoke without cynicism, with the even tone of the soldier too brave to hold a regret. "What's needed," he went on, "is the plunge,—the icy plunge. And there are very few of us big enough to take it. The poet must kiss the feet of poverty before he can write. He must take her to wife. The reformer must kiss the cross, *first*. They don't do it. They dream their dreams in cottages in the Lake country; they direct their charities from scented drawing-rooms; they write their poems in bed mornings between pink silk coverlids. The dreamer must kiss the cross. Otherwise, he might better be a plain old blighter like me. They belie everything that's sacred: they make themselves comfortable in their little private ruts. They purchase the holy unction of benevolence at so many pounds per thrill. They are like so many children at play. Ah, me!—and perfect little wantons. If they would only play pirates, now—— But as they grow older, they insist on playing at holy things. There's not one of them will touch the vile old earth with its sorrow, and loneliness, and wrong,—with so much as their little finger."

Then he sat up suddenly. "Why, bless my soul, this is an harangue, isn't it?"

Their little laughter dissipated the air of intensity,

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and he sank back again in the sand, dreamy-eyed, speaking softly.

"Could you picture to yourself now a rawboned lad out of the university, idling in a London street by night and seeing a crowd flock into a Nonconformist chapel? I was such a lad. Having an idle hour, and never having followed preachers about much, I joined the throng. There was a great evangelist holding forth, and the big building was packed to the roof. . . . I can see him now,—a big, flabby fellow, with the chops and the mane of a lion. He was an orator, no doubt. He had electrified himself by his oratory so that he trod the rostrum like a king. The great crowd hung on his words. He thrilled me, too. My blood rose in response to his words, but my gorge rose with it. . . . You will think I was jealous. But no, I saw him as he was, infinitely farther away from the Kingdom and the humble soul he was preaching about than I,—he, proud, luxuriant, satisfied, grown gross on adulation. The nobler his oratory the more the fighting blood within me rose. I wanted to stumble to my feet and shout him down,—to tell him that he had not the slightest kinship with idealists, dreamers—this darling of the mob. . . . And while he ranted and stormed I saw another Figure behind him,—the very figure of loneliness, and hunger, and neglect,—of failure! . . .

"I stood in the darkness outside alone, for I could

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not endure the heat of the enclosure. I wanted to rush back in there; to stand up before that crowd and declare myself for Him, that other. I was beside myself. I wanted to show them what a man would do who really gave his fealty to such a prince. I would have thrown over everything for Him that instant. I would have gone down to the depths for Him. I would have clasped hands with the worst, the lowest, the most helpless, and toiled and fetched for them! . . .”

He had grown excited again. His voice trembled with emotion.

“And what did happen?” Margarita asked.

“Just then a waggish friend came by and bore me off to supper at an inn.”

“But could you have done it?” she asked. “Is it possible? Even your preacher,—didn’t he set forth with some such ideal, and find by degrees that it couldn’t be done?”

“God knows,” said Guex. “It’s the eternal question. It has been done—once. And wherever I go I take the hat off my unworthy head to Him. They say that it was done once, in India. We come upon it again and again in literature. It’s the greatest story in the world. I have never seen anybody doing it, however. They all make themselves comfortable in their little ruts.” He was silent a long moment. And then he added: “But we must be patient with them,—we folks who sometimes grapple

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with realities. I found next day that I would have to be more charitable toward the preacher. He was simply another of the children—at play."

"That is why dear old Otto called it the Kingdom of Nevercome," she said. And then, while the golden mood lasted, she went back to the old days in the bookshop, and lived them all over again for him. And for the tear that gathered in his dreaming eyes she could have thrown her arms about his neck and kissed him, as she had Otto when she was such a tiny child.

VIII

BUT always, whether at home or abroad, moved in the background of the Princess's life one brilliant, restless figure. Since that first heart-breaking day when, in the sudden storm of his misery, he had admitted her to the confidence of his heart, he had not changed much and she hardly at all. So the mood of past events lingers and dominates until other events come to replace their memories. In that scene the mothering instinct of a tiny girl (and what female is so tiny that she would not mother an elephant if she thought he needed it, and *wanted* it?) had laid its head against his quaking ribs and cooed the poison out of his wound. That had not changed; she was as much concerned for him now,—as ready to throw all her pride away and go to him if she thought he needed it. And he knew it, and smiled over it, and thought it a quaint, pretty, foolish thing in a curious little personality.

He couldn't well think otherwise. He was so ridiculously prosperous; life marched so well with his theory. He wouldn't have been guilty of the

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pious phrase that "the Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," but he was stridently certain that businesslike nature takes the most exquisite care of her own fine products (of whom he happened to be one). He was scarcely twenty-one when his maternal grandmother died, leaving him a quarter-of-a-million dollars. She had been a heavy old woman in a mob-cap with strings, who sat out the last quarter of her eighty years in a kind of faded baronial elegance in a stately white mansion in a Massachusetts town that had known both the whoop of Indian raids and the fine fervor of philosophers and poets. It was (peace to his grandmother's bones) the capstone of a wholly providential career. It was the neat completion of his theory of the divine right of heredity. The world stood justified in his sight,—and whoever or whatever had made it.

There lacked now but one thing: the most beautiful woman in the world to share his destiny; and years back Virginia Witherill had given him her word. True, as a girl, her love had been at times torturesome; but she was such a wonderful creature, with a world at her feet! What else could one expect? And the law of fitness had wrought, would work, its beneficent will even upon her. As Jupiter had gathered his white moons and held them in changeless thrall, so she would come to his feet. . . . It was no overweening conceit that believed this (for, as a matter of fact, Paul Snowden had grown

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more genial, more urbane,—putting aside his puppy rudenesses, as steadily and surely the fine theory proved itself), but a philosophy which he had drunk in as a boy—a divine idea that he saw no reason to change.

He was glad when the Witherills settled in England in his last year at Oxford. He felt that they needed him. Mrs. Witherill, he knew, was beginning to feel her years and her widowhood, and to tire of the whirling life Virginia had led them. She rather leaned on Paul. Even the exceedingly vigorous and rather handsome Mrs. Babbage (Virginia's aunt, herself a widow), who completed the family, could scarcely impart the dignity and security of a man in the house.

To the beautiful old mansion in Surrey where they made their home he went in week-ends and between semesters. He was glad to be near Virginia again. She had never been a tender letter-writer: one could hardly expect that in so superb a creature. But now she would come to him. In some vague way he looked forward to intimacies and responses, to that final surrender which should crown her beauty and make it transcendent; and he had never doubted that the law of fitness would bring it about. . . . Even in the Surrey house, however, there was whirling social life. He rather rejoiced in it. It flattered him to see Virginia the center of a brilliant group, and to note the frank adoration other men gave her.

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He was not even jealous of the young Lord Brayne, though he had met him twice at the Surrey house. Not even when he found that young aristocrat so quietly at ease in his company. Comparatively speaking, it was a long time before the brilliant Paul began to discover the quality of interest in his Lordship. What was it that slightly amused, vaguely irritated, him? The fellow was not a brilliant conversationalist,—he made no pretence to anything of the sort; but he seemed to *enjoy* conversation: one could not say more than that; and in some odd way he became the center of interest in every talking group. Others flashed and coruscated *around* him. He never scintillated; but he had a slow, substantial wit of his own that came like breathing. Not handsome, still there was some subtle air about him that fastened attention. Certainly it was neither distinction nor stateliness, for his Lordship was slender and slightly under height, of a youngish, rather dry countenance; his hair was stiff and touched with premature gray; his features refined but by no means fine; his manner far too simple to merit the epithet of dignity. Even his clothing, not remarkable for cost or cut, yet proclaimed this subtle thing. . . . His pleasure in Virginia was as unaffected, as unconstrained, as perfectly easy.

It was Saturday at a week-end party (the second where Paul had met Lord Brayne) and they were dancing up to midnight in the great hall of the house.

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Paul Snowden sat out a dance with Mrs. Babbage. They were sitting so when Virginia swept past with Brayne.

"Look at her!" (The words were his own.) "Isn't she magnificent! Gad, she's like a young queen, with starlight on her cheek and throat! She is a queen!" he added fervently.

The lady at his side, a heavy but handsome figure in old-rose silk, stirred slightly.

"She would look well in a coronet," she said, quite smilingly, quite composedly.

"A coronet?" he said, without looking round. "The imperial dignity itself is not too rich for Virginia. Nothing less than a diadem is worthy of her."

He had not noted anything. His eyes still followed Virginia rapturously. Then:

"You would not stand in the way of it, Paul?" came from the parvenu at his elbow.

The tone of the words, heard through the music, was hollow, false. There was a nauseating, indescribable mixture in it of wheedling, remonstrance, sudden boldness; a vulgar, sickening intimacy, masked in a brutal attempt at jocularity. And then the creature laughed. . . . Suddenly things went black for Paul. There was the sensation of falling. He had been kicked by a horse when he was a boy.

• He remembered that now in an odd, irrelevant way. But it was nothing like this. Then through the sifted

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darkness of his scattered consciousness he beheld the figure of the woman,—saw her red, fleshly body, her black, gleaming hair, her big, proud eyes,—a gross, fattened worm,—and loathed her inexplicably. He had always known her vulgar to the core. . . . None the less, she was a Witherill. That black, gleaming hair, those imperious dark eyes, they were Virginia's; but that coarse, high-colored flesh!—and the coarser soul of the woman—!

He had recovered the few scattered fragments of a smile, and now he spoke quite evenly.

"I love her enough to go to the block for her. Virginia knows that," he said.

What could it mean? Had Mrs. Babbage spoken for Virginia? Or had she merely expressed her own vaulting ambition? Did Mrs. Witherill know? Certainly the woman had leaped to his words like a hungry trout to the first fly that flicks the water above him. He clasped Mrs. Witherill's hand when, just before twelve, the party broke up, and did the unusual, nervous thing of lifting it to his lips. They had always been more like mother and son. She seemed old and weary,—or was that pity which looked out at him? Iago had not sown a more bitter seed in Othello's breast than Mrs. Babbage in his.

NOT that time, but on his next visit to Surrey, when the house was bare of guests, he sought Virginia.

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"Let's talk on the terrace," he said. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

It was evening, and in the early summer night mists lay thin and silvery on the long undulating pastures that sloped down from the old marble house, palely beautiful in the moonlight, to where a little river wound through the lowlands. Where the park crept round the house and beyond the terrace, bordering the meadows, the silvery grass touched it, too. A hazy moon looked down on the loveliness of it all.

"It's a chilly air," said Virginia. "Do you mind getting me something for my shoulders?"

He brought a soft, thick scarf as silvery as the mists, as silvery as her dinner-gown, and laid it loosely over her shoulders. Under it her beautiful body breathed, shivered, thrilled visibly, as if some Pentelican Aphrodite had stirred, proving the marble flesh.

"You wanted to talk to me?" she said quietly.

"Yes."

"About what?"

He had been standing, regarding the beautiful scene below the terrace.

"About this English landscape." A slight surprise trembled visibly through her. "It's—it's different, isn't it? Somehow, it gives one the sense of quiet, slow centuries. It's been beautiful like this hundreds of years. One can't think of it as having

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been a howling wilderness, ever. Do you know what I mean?"

"It has that air of peace you speak of."

"Virginia," he said rather suddenly. "It means more than that. The English people are like that. One feels it, but can't define it. It's another *kind* of life. It's a finer type of living. I think you must know what I mean. These people *live*. They are not forever doing something, making something. They don't need to. They give their whole time to living, and they know how. It would mean more to a woman than to a man. And then I think of taking you away and setting you up in a New England town,—to learn the New England conscience, the New England spirit, and to make your way into their rather edgy social life!"

She did not speak. She did not move. For a full moment he watched the quiet rhythm of her breathing. If she had shown so much as the least tremor! That even breathing filled him with dismay. Did she not feel the crisis that was descending upon them? Or had she seen it long since, and steeled herself to meet it in this superb fashion? The thought linked her horribly with Mrs. Babbage. His own blood, mounting fiercely, would not be calmed in face of that incredible composure of hers.

"You have been quicker to sense this thing than I," he went on. "It appeals to you?"

"Oh, I could live in England forever!" she said

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ecstatically, stretching her clasped hands languorously beyond the balustrade.

He had nothing to stay him in a tide like this. He knew that he was losing himself. But he blundered on:

"And I stand between it and you," he said bitterly. Then he flung along, rather desperately. "Virginia, you understand this thing perfectly. You have seen it coming. To me it's all new. I've just sensed it—men are like that, slow to comprehend. It's bigger than I. It sweeps me off my feet. I appeal to you: Tell me the bare truth! I've—I've always lived by it, in my poor way. I ought to be willing to die by it. Tell me frankly— You love what England is offering you! You——"

"It's no use talking like this, Paul," she flung out, with a weary gesture. "I gave you my word years ago. I don't intend to break it."

"No, listen!" he exclaimed. "We can't shout down facts. I have always wanted you to have the biggest, most beautiful life that a woman can have. It's been my one idea. Conceited fool that I am, I have always supposed that I could give you that! But I was wrong. Here's something finer—something not in my power to give. But no!—it is in my gift. That's just the blood-sweating curse of it! I can place it in your hands with a word." He paused. She bowed her beautiful head toward her white hands, still clasped.

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"You want me to say——?" she faltered.

"That it is, or it isn't, true!"

"I can't say that it isn't true," she said dumbly; "I'm dreadfully sorry. All I know is, I have given you my troth."

That dull reaffirmation crushed him utterly.

"Fool, fool!" he said, in an excess of self-reproach. "I have built my house of life on *things*—the stuff, the dignities, the honors of this earth. I have had nothing else to give. It was the one idea behind our love. I have wanted you to have the best. I do still, and because I know now that it can be given only one way—Virginia!—"

He had gone on his knee now, and reached imploring hands to her, his face burning with tremulous feeling—

"I give it."

In that moment of his sudden, unspeakable collapse she turned to him and put a limp hand in his hot clasp. Then it had cost her something? She had softened; she appeared blanched, weakened, mild, womanly.

"It is a question of your generosity, Paul," she said. "I have never asked it." It was the first time he had heard the melting sweetness of a woman's heart in her voice,—this time, when she was already drifting out beyond the warm circle of his adoration.

IX

BUT if his head fell forward until his throbbing temples touched her fingers, he did not remain long in that melodramatic attitude. A Snowden might grovel for a moment, but not longer. Luckily it was near the end of the year and he continued at the University, taking his degree. Then he flung restraint to the winds, booked on a P. & O. steamer and set out to circle the earth.

It was a full year later, and spring was sorting her flowers, when Paul appeared at The Ledges. Exigencies of the publishing business, the need of a novelist of American manners *sometimes* living in America, to say nothing of absurd and wholly unreasonable fluctuations in stocks, had obliged Mr. Snowden to reclaim The Ledges from the hands of the renting agent; and once more the family was settled there.

Paul seemed taller, though that couldn't be. He was muscular, however, and brown, and very thin. He had been among gold-hunters, sheep-boys, pearl-divers; he had made a blundering trip in Africa, and caught the fever. He had ranged

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Japan, plunged into Tartary, and loafed a whole season at Waikiki. He had been months on the sea in boats of every sort; he had struggled with salmon at the falls of the Columbia River, he had been mountain-climbing in the Canadian Rockies, and he had been down to Alaska in the canning season. He was a different man—fascinating, racy, indescribably vivid in conversation, with eyes burning brilliantly at times as he talked of his travels; but in repose gloomy, irritable, disillusioned.

Margarita who had not yet found herself, or indeed much that was definite in life, looked up happily into his face. After all, she liked this ridiculous big brother better than any other of the stalky, statuesque creatures who called themselves men; she had a sense of property in him, and she was tremendously anxious to share the new misery that her instant eyes knew cankered in his breast.

"Paul, dear," she said, one day when they were together in the garden, "do you mind if I talk about it?"

"*It?*" he asked, with mock bewilderment.

"Yes, *it*," she said, and her clear eyes put away all pretense. "You know, I'm just your simple, foolish little sister. And nobody lets me share their troubles; in fact, nobody just here has any to share. You remember, you told me the first chapter yourself, and we read the last chapter in the papers—at

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least, we read that Virginia had become the Countess Warden."

"That wasn't the last chapter," said Paul, with an amused sniff. "I'm just working on that now. No, I don't care, Mousie. Go ahead and talk about it if you like—it's public property, anyhow. Only, I warn you it is not the theme for tears you may think it. It's what Dad called it—an incident; and, as far as I'm concerned, pretty nearly a closed incident. I'm rather glad it happened."

"If you think my opinion is worth anything," she said, "I may say that I'm glad, too. Virginia was very beautiful, but she was not a mate for my big boy—not *really*—not good enough!"

She shook her head very earnestly, and her sober eyes met his, rather filmy and uncertain these days. From where he had stooped to examine some crowding pansy-heads, he had looked up smiling. He was much more humane, much kinder—as if her motherly sympathy no longer offended, but brought a mild, not unpleasing amusement. Then he rose and taking her jauntily by the arm hurried her off to a lounging place on the terrace, where they sat down.

"You're a good little sister," he said. "You're pure gold. In fact, you're so good that you sometimes make me think I could be good for something myself. Fact is, you see, Mousie, I'm not. I'm a highly educated thing. I'm good-looking—at least, better-looking than young Hoppinton (and,

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by the way, I saw him in London a year ago, and he's a perfect Adonis); I'm rich—at least, as the world accounts riches; and I'm healthy as a pig—as two pigs! But I'm utterly and absolutely useless. I'm not even needed for ornament. You see, as far as Virginia is concerned, she was to be the figure on the top of a purely decorative column. And she was so beautiful that for a decade or more she kept me from realizing. Her refusing to be the head-piece simply gave me a chance to look the whole thing over, from the ground up, and I saw what a futile, foolish thing it was. I might have found another headpiece; but I didn't have the nerve after that. The architecture was bad—*very* bad!"

He paused for a moment. He seemed unusually genial, almost happy in this breezy summary of himself.

"And hers was, too," he continued. "Now, if I'd gone on in the conventional way, Virginia and I would have been married. Then we would have kept the jig going, say ten years more. After which, I would have awakened to just these facts—I'd have found out that it was all a stupid piece of 'drammer,' or something worse. Only Virginia would have been tied up in it then. As it is—"

The Princess completed the sentence for him: "She'll never wake up," she said definitively.

They were companionable, despite the worlds that

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separated them, and they were much together. At times he was brilliant, boyish, impetuous, with: "Let's get the flies and go fishing!"; "Let's have the canoe out and go up to the head of the lakes, if it takes all day!"; or, "Suppose we take old Rounder and drive him off his feet. I just feel like the Devil to-day."

At such times she had an uneasy feeling that the drugs he was using for sleep might be dangerous—that they were working a change in his nervous constitution. And those other nights, when he read all night, or wrote, appearing at the breakfast table declaring that sleeping was a sheer waste of good time, anyway, were not reassuring.

IT was a humid June morning when they had actually gone fishing in an old mill-pond a mile away in the valley, that she told him of the wonderful new friend she had found that spring.

"Oh, Mrs. Faire," he exclaimed. "Is she still coming here? Delicious little faker, isn't she?"

Taken aback, Margarita answered, very modestly: "The Pursse's still have their house on the other side of the village. They're always here summers, I believe. Mrs. Faire usually comes with them. She was in the mountains last year, however. It's a splendid old house,—so comfy and old-fashioned,—and the grounds are so big and open,—and the view out there is quite charming."

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"I remember her very distinctly," Paul mused, straightening his fly for a fresh cast. "She must be getting into the sere and yellow leaf by now. They used to call her the Humming Bird. She tickled me under the chin once, and I fell in love with her right away, and wanted to marry her—that is, I wanted her to wait for me. Oh, I must have been as much as eight years old. In those days Dad had an idea that it was his sacred duty to take his son and heir to church every Sunday morning. Mrs. Faire and Mrs. Pursse used to walk down the aisle of the church, bowing and nodding to everybody, and asking after all the kids, like the ladies of the manor in an English village congregation. Everybody cottoned to Mrs. Faire—at least, all the men and boys. I've an idea that if she had invited the men to join her in a minuet, when the procession filed out after service, every mother's son among them would have left his sober spouse and promising progeny on the instant,—and she always looked as though she were just ready to break into a dance step."

Margarita did not conceal her dislike of this kind of thing.

"Of course, she never did the slightest thing like it," she said.

"Of course not," he answered, quite unabashed. "If she had, she'd have spoiled everything, and it was too good to spoil."

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Margarita maintained significant silence for a moment. Then,

"But she is rather like a humming bird," she said.
"Pretty, petite, swift, gay."

"Yes," he assented, "with a long, slender bill for getting instantly at the honey in the heart of a flower, without so much as touching the flower, and all the while humming sweetly to herself or humming the flower to sleep—I don't know which. Not going, Margie?"

He spoke to a figure that was slowly, reluctantly, drawing away from him.

"She is a very dear friend of mine," Margarita said slowly. "I don't understand your speaking of her that way. It's—it's cynical; it's common. It's not at all like you. Mrs. Faire is wonderful. She's so brave! She has taken that great sorrow of hers and spiritualized it,—made it beautiful. One doesn't meet rare souls like that every day. I—I love her—very, very much." In the simple fervor of her eyes he saw the moist look which stopped his idle tongue.

"Forgive me, Mousie," he said. "I don't mean to let the beastly side of me show like that. I do usually keep it out of sight, don't I? I'd forgotten about her losing her two little kids. That was rather rough. But as for young Tommy Faire blowing himself up after he'd tired of her, I've always considered that a rather gentlemanly thing on his

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part." It was on his tongue to say something further, but he could see that Margarita's loyal soul was already suffering keenly, and he checked himself.

X

SOCIAL life at The Ledges was thin and of a somewhat sober color. There were good families about—a few—mostly moneyed people from the big city, who had built summer homes there among the hills. There was a quasi-literary colony, to whom The Eminent Novelist was a kind of perennial lion. Mr. and Mrs. Snowden cultivated a staid, elderly group, and were quietly contented. The Princess, however, would have been decidedly lonely but for her new-found friend,—and Paul. When he was not actually with her he was on her mind, and on her heart. *He* had grown distinctly unsocial. It was strange to note how rude he could be, even in pleasant company, and with what a sort of fascination he would hurry back to the house and to that set of rooms in the east gable that had always been his. . . . There were whole days when he did not come down. He talked of no trips, planned no journeys. . . . For one thing, since his return he had become a prodigious smoker, consuming amazing numbers of black cigars.

Margarita wondered, and it is not too much to

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say that she worried. From her room window nights, after the family had broken up, she could make him out wandering restlessly in the garden, sometimes very late. Wondering about him often stole the sleep from her own eyes. Poor boy! She would have given so much to be able to help him in a sorrow that she sensed ran very deep! But he was worlds away, and she was only a woman, and she did not know how to get across to him.

"Do you know," she said to him one evening when he had consented to walk with her to the summer-house at the bottom of the garden, where in the dusk she felt less embarrassment about speaking, "as I have grown older I have recovered most of my dear story,—the story of the Kingdom and the Prince of Nevercome? Of course you remember that day in the Tuileries gardens?"

They both laughed gently over it now.

"What a youthful beast I was!" he said, "and how altogether proud of my iconoclasm." Then suddenly he turned to her, with an alarming earnestness. "Do you know, sis," he said, "I'd give my worthless head to-night if I could put that story back in your breast as it was that day,—sweet, and whole, and entire. Yes, and all your ridiculous confidence in that old bookshop fellow you used to associate with when you were a kid. I remember you didn't know he was dead." He laughed, but there was a sadness that spoiled its ring. "That would

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be something worth while. I'm beginning to think that all that makes life endurable for most people is their little absurd faiths. The saddest reflection I have is, that with my education and so-called learning I could sneer the faith out of a thousand men, but I couldn't put one little drop of that healing salve into a single human soul. It rather floors me, that."

"I bleed for you," the girl said simply. "And now when I am beginning to be so happy again myself! Paul, dear, you needn't worry. The old dream is coming back of itself. I don't think it was ever quite lost. Perhaps there is some subtle change in me,—expanding, needing something, as if my whole nature fitted this thing, cried out for it. I don't know. But it is coming back, and, as if it brought a new set of senses with it, I am beginning to understand. I think I might have believed it all along. But the world—yes, the whole world, has put me on the defensive, shamed me out of it. Now I'm beginning to get strong again, self-reliant. Some day I'm going to give up everything, like some modern Joan, and just don armor and fare forth and fight for my Kingdom and my Prince. . . . I think my finding this beautiful new friend has had something to do with it. She is showing me the way. I shall be like her."

"You mean Mrs. Faire?"

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To her quickly answered "Yes," he kept an eloquent silence.

"You can't imagine what it means," she said, "looking all up and down the earth for someone like that, until you're utterly worn out and discouraged, and then coming suddenly on someone so much sweeter and truer than you could have believed."

Again her voice died out, and from the surrounding darkness came not a single responsive sound.

"*Oh, Paul!*" she said, leaning suddenly forward and putting all her love for him into one intense question, "Don't you think you could stop being an unbeliever, and begin and share my dream?" She gave him scarcely a chance to reply before she went tremulously on: "It is true. The Kingdom of Kindness is *just* over there! The Prince is forever coming. I've seen it with my own eyes! I've seen it in the strangest places. Think how wonderfully you are equipped for it! Think how much you could do in little ways,—how many thousands of eyes you could kindle with some little touch of generosity. Think how many souls you could comfort and help! You are free to give your whole splendid life to this thing!"

She stopped, quite out of breath, and with the deadly feeling that she had staked all her strength and lost.

She could tell, then, from the tone of his next

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words, that he was smiling gently, wearily, there in the dark.

"Ah, there's the trouble," he said. "It's a question of giving one's self—and I'm not worth giving. What people want, especially the ones who are in trouble, is a friend. They don't ask for money, or ease, or health, or any *thing*. . . . They make you ashamed of yourself with your poor cheap ideas about money and what it can do. . . . But the trouble is, I'm not capable of being a friend to anybody. No rich man is. Wealth swells his head, distorts his views, until he hasn't a natural or truly humane idea about anything. It can't be helped. It's like the action of heat on water—irresistible. When a rich man gets the idea that he can be democratic, then he *does* make a fool of himself! He can't possibly rid himself of the money standard. If he could, he'd throw his money into the sea. Nature abhors a rich man. She tries to immure him, just as she does certain types of disease in the human body. When he attempts to break out, she makes his manners and ideas more and more stupid and ridiculous, until it is simply impossible for him to get out on the highway of life and meet another human soul with simplicity and candor, and appreciate that other just for what he is. . . .

"Why, Paul," she said, "that sounds so dreadfully hopeless!"

"It is hopeless—perfectly so. We're all such lit-

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tle automatic creatures and we live so completely in our ruts, and squeal so when anybody tries to pull us out of them. And we're all so full of vanity and petty conceit. But what are you going to do about it?"

They were both silent. For the moment he had completely obscured her bright assurance, and she could not confute him.

"Life's a Monte Carlo," he went on then, more solemnly; "and all the people simply gamblers. It must be so: that's the way the thing's made. The poor are just as proud as the rich,—yes, prouder. They pride themselves on keeping the rules of the game. They lose, and they pay their bets. It's their honor. It may be all that's left to them, but they cling by that. Of course there are quitters on both sides, bad winners and bad losers,—people who feel guilty about their winnings and want to divide up—just a little, just enough to permit them to keep the bulk of their winnings with an easy conscience. And there are enough bad losers to match them. . . . Just conceive (as Browning would say) : I am standing at a table, winning steadily, when in comes a poor, haggard fellow who has just pawned his last diamond, can't pay his hotel bill. He stakes his louis one by one, with that awful glitter of worlds to gain in his eye. His last counter goes. He turns white and grits his teeth hard. Outside among the shrubberies he presses a revolver to his head. Sup-

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pose I followed him, offered to share with him? Would he be willing? Don't you see? He's nothing but his honor left, and I offer to buy that? He'd be warranted in shooting me first, and himself afterward."

"It's perfect logic," she said, speaking as soberly as he. "But you don't leave any place for love."

He was lighting one of his nauseous black cigars, and in the glow she could see him shake his head.

"There isn't any love," he said, "where we all live so absolutely for self. And we all do, you know."

After a moment or two, he went on: "The only hope I can see, is in keeping the wheel spinning. Things come right after a while that way. I can pass over what I have to someone else,—when the wheel turns briskly enough. And that's right and legitimate." There was something inexpressibly sinister in his speech, and she shuddered. "You, for instance, Mousie. I really believe you're different. You're penniless. If you had my useless wealth you might fare forth mightily for your Prince. You might be able to do something. Suppose I make you my heir?"

Although he had said nothing definite, he had made her flesh creep.

"Oh, Paul!" she cried out suddenly. "This is intolerable." And in the glow of his cigar he saw that she had covered her face with her hands.

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Something there was about that evening that lingered horribly in her mind. Thereafter she watched over him with an increasing anxiety. As if she had seen a morbid second nature in him, she brooded over what he might do. She did not think him unmanly. Only she felt the dark forces that were playing about his soul. They played upon her, too; upon her sensitive nature, until she paled with dread and fear. At night she would put out her lamp and lie sleepless. Or she would wait in the dark, still dressed, leaning beside the window to catch his light tread on the gravel below, or his soft footfall on the floor above, or to make out the glow of his cigar somewhere in the gardens, or to see the light of his study lamp falling uncertainly on distant trees.

As if some subtle bond were linking them, some ethereal influence that flowed from one to the other, as if she were a second soul of his, she moved and swayed to all that the boy was going through, and waited and watched with all her sleepless loyalty. In his hour of trial she could not fail him.

That night of nights there was something like a fever in her bones. She was tremulous and startled. She lay down, but could not lie still. A growing excitement in her warned her to be up and ready. Some shuddersome thing advanced upon her there in the dark, sought to shroud her, stifle her, drive her back. She sprang from her bed and went to the window. There was not a sound in all the moonlit night, not

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a spark of his cigar anywhere to be seen, not a glint of his lamp on any tree. She told herself that he was abed and returned to her own couch, reproaching her fears, and fell asleep.

What had aroused her she could not say! But it was there, ten-fold intensified—that dread. It was not like something born of the morbid fancy. It was like a presence, a sinister being near. For a long moment she fought it back. Then, with an electrified resolve, she was out of bed and dressing. She slipped into her mules, drew on a light wrap—a thing of pale China silk, adorned with little tassels, slipped through her room door, and noiselessly down the long hall. She had no more idea where she was going than why. Instinct was guiding purely.

From the garden border she could look up and see his windows—lightless, open, the moonlight a pale fabric in their hollow mouths. But there was not a sound anywhere, and in the pale mists of the half-lit night she moved among flowers a wraith. Instinct would not let her be still; guided her feet down by the little tinkling waterways to the bridge across the pool's-end, to the summer-house beside the pool.

How grateful it was to fling herself down on the familiar bench and bow her frightened head on her hands with tears! So there was nobody, absolutely

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nobody, in the garden where instinct had led her steps. And the nameless horror had gone.

She would have returned now, quite relieved and happy, but a light crunch on the gravel above her startled her. Presently she saw him coming down the winding path beside the little tinkling waterfalls. He was coming slowly, ghostlike, like one who walks in a dream. His coming did not strike terror. She felt strong; she could not doubt her will to save him, nor her absolute power. What frightened her was seeing that he was fully, even scrupulously, dressed.

He came down to the little flower-edged esplanade beside the pool. He could not have seen her if he had been looking. Presently from his side pocket he drew something that flashed white in the moonlight. . . .

"Paul! Paul! I" she shrieked, and rushed upon him.

"Oh, Paul," she pleaded. Her arm was about his neck. Her other arm had bound his fast against his body. With her outstretched fingers she was searching for something. With her pleading, fearless eyes she looked up into his face, and there, in the pale moonlight, he smiled benignly, amusedly, down at her.

"Take it," he said, and nobody could have doubted his sincerity. "Take it. You've spoiled the setting."

He placed in her hands the gleaming weapon, and she turned it over once, then flung it into the center

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of the pool, where it threw back a handful of sparkling silver drops.

"Oh, Paul," and again her tone had fallen to an infinite pathos. "Surely you're not that kind of a coward," she said.

"It isn't cowardice, Mousie," he said. "The drammer is over—that's all. It's all been played. Don't you understand? There isn't any more. The curtain ought to fall, and the audience ought to go home to bed."

"There's a great deal more," she said. "There's all of life to live. There's the Kingdom and the Prince—for you. And, oh, Paul! I mean to win you into it!"

There was still a cynical smile upon his lips.

"I would, little sister," he said, rather gently, no doubt pitying her pale, tense figure there before him. "But I simply can't understand how it's to be done. It's like asking a fellow to be somebody else. It's like asking him to start on a wholly new existence. It's all black. There's absolutely nothing out there."

The real test had come. She gritted her teeth hard that she might not fail him. In the moonlight her little brown hands and arms out of the loose-falling sleeves went up in a very expressive gesture—her fists clenched tight, her mouth compressed, her jaw clean-cut as a warrior's going into battle.

"Oh, Paul," she said, "there's more wounded pride in this than you know. But I want you! Oh!

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how I want you. You must just cling fast there in the dark to that something you don't believe is there. You must lift your hands, and take hold, and grip hard. The Kingdom's very near."

Her face was set and very pale. At first he smiled, but the smile faded from his lips. He saw that she was pleading against himself for his life. Then suddenly, looking down at her, he *saw* her—saw her as he had never seen her before, saw the brave faith, the steadfastness, the unflinching loyalty that she had always given him; saw that, like that girl-mother who bore him, she had been watching over him, pitying him, loving him,—and knew instantly that something was due to that love,—this much, this little thing she asked. Then slowly his knotted hands went up, like hers still moveless before him. Slowly he gripped some fanciful thing there in the air and clung fast. Slowly he lifted his face, frank and sincere, to see the thing she saw and believed in—the first real prayer of his life. And in that instant he knew, and she knew, too, that he was saved.

"Little Mouse," he cried ecstatically, "a fellow ought to go down on his knees to a brave little thing like you. Instead of that, I catch you up as if you had been a bouquet,—sweet-smelling, old-fashioned flowers,—and I whirl you around three times, and I set you down again." And he did indeed pick her up like a baby in his arms and whirl her about, her

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bright silken gown fluttering out in billowy soft flame around her. Whereupon he kissed her twice and set her down. "Don't suppose, though, because I treat you without dignity that I think myself worthy to loose the latchets of your shoes. Now you've got me started on life again, God knows what trials you may have to keep me straight. But I'll try."

THAT was the secret of his fleeing to the wilderness again—to the big open spaces for body and soul. He must be free from every hampering littleness that had hedged him about.

The next morning he had started for a ranch in the far west. And the strangest part of the various equipment for that trip was a set of Blackstone's *Commentaries*.

XI

JUST why Margarita should have chosen to idealize a so entirely artificial person as Mrs. Faire is difficult to understand. In the last analysis, of course, it must be laid to the fact that the air-dweller, when he descends to earth, is without those keen and instant standards by the aid of which alone the earth-dweller makes himself comfortable in a rabidly conventional world.

Mrs. Faire's sister-by-marriage, Mrs. Pursse, had called as soon as the returned Snowdens were settled. But Mrs. Faire had been away that first summer, and it was not until the second spring that Margarita met her. Being the oldest and most consistent of the summer-dwellers thereabout, the hospitality of the entire countryside was theirs in a manner to extend, and they extended it with an exceeding grace and kindness. Between Mrs. Faire and the sober-eyed girl who happened onto the porch unaware while Mrs. Snowden was entertaining these ladies, sprang up a flame of instant recognition and rejoicing. Within a half-hour these two who had not so much as dreamed of one another's existence before were

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strolling down a garden path in an attitude of tender intimacy—Mrs. Faire's arm around Margarita's waist, her feet picking out the exact time of the girl's steps, her ear dwelling on her words with that gentle interest which only souls in rapport know. There could be no doubt that Mrs. Faire was mistress of the delicate art of companionship.

In some degree this wonderful new friendship was due to the faculty for beauty which so strongly dominated them both. Mrs. Faire *was* artificial—to such a degree that even her speech sounded like a recital from a phrase-book. To such a degree that if she found herself speaking in a spontaneous, unconstrained manner, she would check herself in the midst of a sentence, retrace her steps, and say the thing as it *was* written in the phrase-book. They were pretty phrases, however, selected with an exquisite ear, and sedulously gathered. They made very pretty speech: the charm of it was quite unmistakable. It was spoken, too, with a gaiety, a joyousness, as unaffectedly happy as that of a child.

Her manner was like that—her approach to people. With humbler folk, as with her social equals, she was as pretty, as quickly sympathetic, as simply appealing, as if she had never known the touch of rude life. Mrs. Pursse was different, though very kindly. She was of rather a coarse fiber, and her attentions, especially to poorer people, were effusive and somewhat ostentatious. She "o'erstepped the

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modesty of nature" with a large foot. Plain people endured her kindnesses with that good-natured toleration they invariably accord to underbred people. But Mrs. Faire had a quick sense of proportion. Her touch was infinitely delicate. To her all hearts opened sweetly and naturally.

"You *will* come and see me, then?" Mrs. Faire said to Margarita. "I shall be so happy to know that you are near! We shall see each other often, I hope, before the summer is over, and be *real good friends!*"

Looking into her clear hazel eyes that were limpid and pure as woodland springs, and without a trace of dissimulation, Margarita could not disguise her adoration. She had given her heart wholly and unashamed to Mrs. Faire. And then, as if Mrs. Faire were not charming enough in her own right, she proceeded to invest her with all the high qualities of her own soul. She read that elusive little appeal in her friend's face, and knew it was the deep sorrows of her embittered married life and the rude loss of her infant sons. She interpreted her gaiety as something wonderfully brave,—a process by which she had coined all her tears into pure gold of understanding, gentleness and helpfulness. The simple little Princess would have had her see how greatly she loved her for these things.

Mrs. Faire was prettiest in her own garden. There her quick little movements among the flowers

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showed like the darting of a bird. She was a tiny creature, made on the model of a Watteau shepherdess, but with a touching sobriety in color and line. Perhaps she had imbibed the thought, for behind the exquisite modesty of her dress (a modesty which only heightened her natural charm), she never greatly departed from that model. For Margarita, hungry for a beauty touched with something ethereal, there was a continual æsthetic pleasure in watching Mrs. Faire, which was only momentarily eclipsed when that lady put up her mouth to be kissed at parting.

IT was in these days that Margarita's world began to take more definite shape. She had elected not to go to college. She was hungering and thirsting now for the old quest. She wanted to touch humble life in her own way. She wanted to share. And yet no word expresses quite the feeling. Really, she wanted to go back and *live* in the old brick house opposite the oh-so-tiny park, and gather the old family about her, and work with them, and love them, just as if she had grown up Mamma K.'s little girl. But the net of fate forbade that. . . . She resolved on charitable work,—in the settlements, perhaps,—as the best thing open to her. She would adjust herself to their system; she would suppress her own wild notions, and *fit in*; only, she must touch the life of the helpless somewhere!

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To this world of new hopes Mrs. Faire was a kind of introduction. Her life was devoted to philanthropies. They talked much about the charities of the great city, where, during the winter season, Mrs. Faire was prodigiously busy with directorships, committee-meetings, boards and what-not. She was especially interested in a working girls' home, of whose governing body she was the presiding officer.

"It is a wonderful work, my dear," she told Margarita. "There are so many homeless girls in the big city—girls who have never had half a chance, and when they fall ill or are thrown out of employment they are subject to the most awful temptations! They so need a loving hand stretched out to them in their struggles! We shall have one delightful morning together when I can take you to see our Martha Home."

Even in the country, Margarita knew, she was not free from the pressure of crowding philanthropies. There were months of work to be planned out, and an eternal flood of correspondence. To these Mrs. Faire gave herself with such diligence that Margarita had a curious sense of trespassing when she went to see her. But Mrs. Faire banished any such idea by the warmth of her greetings.

Once, when Margarita gave her name to the pretty maid at the door, and the girl had receded in the dim interior, she thought she heard, through the screen-doors, an exclamation of annoyance. But on

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the instant Mrs. Faire appeared with open arms running toward her, and welcoming her with such a bright smile that she attributed the exclamation, whatever it was, to some other cause, or person; or perhaps to her own absurd sensitiveness.

"I have been wishing that you would come," Mrs. Faire exclaimed. "And I'm so glad that you came to-day, for to-morrow I should have been from home."

WITH the first brush of winter the summer dwellers fled back to the city. Mr. Snowden had secured an ample house well up on the west side. The Pursse's lived in their own old home in the region about Madison Square. Mrs. Faire kept house in an apartment but a block or two away. Margarita, making her first essays in philanthropy, entered a settlement as a volunteer, serving as a librarian three afternoons a week.

She saw little of Mrs. Faire, but that lady was much in her thoughts. When days were hard, and she came upon strange, bitter experiences of the materialistic thing, the automatic thing (Paul's old idea), when her own faith seemed feeble, she thought of this beautiful friend that life had brought her, and instantly her weakness vanished. She was strangely contented knowing of the love that existed between them; but there were times when she passionately longed to be near her. She knew, though,

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how very busy Mrs. Faire was, and repressed the desire.

Once she went (it was in one of her "off" afternoons) and found Mrs. Faire from home. It was a keen disappointment, but she blamed herself for not appreciating how necessary it was for Mrs. Faire to get away from her crowding work at every opportunity. She had no secretary, and the endless detail must have been very exhausting.

Once again she went. It was in the first gray snow of winter, and she had chosen a morning. Perhaps Mrs. Faire would be free this morning to show her the Martha Home. But her heart misgave her as she ascended to the lady's apartment: she feared that she might be selfishly breaking in on work that was infinitely more important than her own little selfish desires. That was the day when the maid returned to say: "Mrs. Faire is awfully sorry, but she is engaged on some work that must be completed before lunch. She wants to know if you won't please call again."

If there was any lingering feeling of disappointment over these discouragements, it was completely wiped out when Margarita met Mrs. Faire in a big department store, and surprise and pleasure so bubbled from the lady's eyes, and she insisted so warmly that Margarita go to lunch with her nearby, that the old joy returned in all its fulness, and the girl left her again a worshiper.

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"And you won't *mind* my being so busy that morning when you called?" Mrs. Faire had said. "And you *will come* and see me whenever you can spare the time?"

IN the depth of that long, bitter winter Margarita was indeed preoccupied. She came down with the first of those long, weary illnesses. They said she had been too wholly wrapped up in the work at the settlement. She had thrown her whole soul, not only into the work, but into the quest. There were times when the Prince was near, and the Kingdom; but each of those wonderful hours was costing her something—life itself. Her cheek was very pale, her eyes glittered with nervous excitement; but she pressed on beyond her slender strength with shoulders squarely set, and very happy.

In the hours of that long, dragging recovery there were moments when she pitied herself ever so little, unconsciously. She wanted a warmer sympathy than even her beautiful mother could give. She wanted Mrs. Faire. . . . She would come in a minute, if she knew. But she was so very busy. . . . She almost asked her mother to write to her little friend, but the request died just as it trembled to her lips. No,—Mrs. Faire had better uses for her time even than that.

She was made unspeakably happy, therefore, when

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Mrs. Snowden, returning from some afternoon calls, said that she had met Mrs. Faire,

"And did you mention me?" Margarita could not help asking.

"You poor dear!" Mrs. Snowden exclaimed, kissing the pale cheek; "of course I did!"

"And did you say that I would love to see her?"

"She did not give me time," Mrs. Snowden answered. "She was overwhelmed with sympathy. She was so sorry she had not known. She would come and see you at once! So now, I hope you will be quite happy!"

It was fully six weeks later when Mrs. Faire called. The Snowdens had been in the papers. It was in connection with the visit of the Prince and Princess Boreskoff to America. Somewhere at a club a reporter had learned that the Prince had been one of an intimate group of literary men in Paris, of whom Mr. Snowden was another, and that Mr. Snowden would entertain him at a select dinner,—which fact was fulsomely blazoned in the Sunday newspapers.

Mrs. Faire displayed a very frank interest in the Prince.

"Of course," she said, "it was horrid, my dear" (to Mrs. Snowden); "my maid showed me the item in her newspaper. The Prince must be a very interesting personage. And the Princess! I have taken

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such an interest in her work for the blind in Paris!"

"They are very charming people," Mrs. Snowden replied. "At least, the Princess is, and Mr. Snowden says the Prince is very wonderful, too. All that I know of him is that he is immense; that he is covered with coal-black hair,—all but his eyes, which are covered with spectacles; that he consumes enormous quantities of beer without any visible effect; that he reads everything that can properly be called literature in any language, including the Chinese; and that he thinks women have no intellect."

"Why, how perfectly fascinating!" Mrs. Faire exclaimed. And then, in a lowered and sympathetic tone. "But who is this? Oh, my—my dear child! How pale you are! You have been so ill, haven't you?"

Margarita, still in the loose clothing of the sick-room, but radiant at the sound of the voice she loved, had descended to the reception-room.

"May I come in?" she asked with a wan smile. "I know I'm not fit. But I did so want to see Mrs. Faire!"

And when the busy little philanthropist came to leave, a few moments later, and her clear eyes were never so pure, so free from the slightest trace of deceit, she was pressing Margarita to her breast.

"I'm so sorry," she murmured. "I had no idea

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you were ill like this. I thought it might be just a slight cold. And so,—just as soon as you are well enough—Remember!—you *will come* and see me—won't you?"

XII

THREE had been dark hours in that long illness —hours when all the light and sweetness were quite fled, leaving life stripped and stark. But when she was a prey to dark moods like that, she rubbed a kind of wonderful lamp, and lo! her beautiful new friend was beside her. She leaned hard upon her those days. She could not have her in bodily presence, but she could think upon her, and that was brightness, reassurance, peace! It was Mrs. Faire, she thought, whose bright, pure spirit was bringing her through.

She was unspeakably happy, then, that day when she could at last go to the telephone and say to her friend that she was coming.

Mrs. Faire's maid received her name, and went to call her mistress. Then there was a large, pretentious, rather shrill voice on the wire:

“Miss Gresham—Miss Margarita Gresham? Oh, I'm so glad to hear you! . . . No, this is not Mrs. Faire; this is Mrs. Pursse, Mrs. Faire's sister. Mrs. Faire has just gone out. Won't I do?”

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"It was only to ask when it would be convenient for Mrs. Faire to see me," Margarita faltered.

"Well—er——! Mrs. Faire isn't here. But could you come *Thurs*-day? I know she'd be so glad to see you. She intends to be at home all that day. . . . Shall I tell her, then, that you will call?"

As Margarita turned away from the instrument a strange thought came with the sting of a slap. . . . Mrs. Faire had been in the room all the time! . . . There was a ring of amusement in Mrs. Pursse's voice. For some reason they were laughing at her! . . .

But instantly the girl's loyal soul was to the fore. Such a thought was contemptible! Out of what dark pit had it come? It only showed how sickness invaded the mind, bringing strange, bitter, muddy ideas in its train. Mrs. Faire herself was the refutation of such a cruel imagination. Margarita crushed it instantly.

Thursday, then!

She told her mother of her happiness.

As THE cab (it was an old, battered depot hack they had sent) rolled across Broadway and into a side street on its way downtown, Margarita became suddenly aware of a throng on the curb,—not a very great throng, but people coming magically from nowhere, as they do on sudden alarms, and craning necks and hustling one another hysterically. From

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far along the street there were figures running. A shabby hansom had pulled in at the curb. From her open window Margarita could see a girl with a washed-out, empty face, rather overdressed in a cheap boa and picture-hat; a big, pink-cheeked policeman leering down at her; a hard-looking Jehu in a livery top-hat, whip in hand, expostulating. He had a beak like a hawk, very high-colored, and infinitely small black eyes that snapped viciously as he talked. Margarita signaled her old driver to pull up.

"Tempted suicide," the fellow was whining. "Lord! I wasn't driving! Look in the hack: I ain't got no fare. I was just off a walk—no more. She dived in front of the horse head first, that's what she did. I hollered, but what good did it do,—with a person determined to get killed like that? Lucky thing the shaft struck her and knocked her. Otherwise she'd have got stepped on, and run over, too.

There *was* blood running from her ear into the hair that clustered against the boa.

"I couldn't see him," the girl protested dully. "That baker's cart had just gone by—"

"Aw!" Jehu snorted. "He went by a year ago!"

"I've just come out of the hospital. . . . I might have fainted. I don't know. . . . I guess I'm hungry," the girl went on, apparently not greatly concerned as to details.

"Where do you live?" the officer questioned.

"God knows. I got no home. I slept night be-

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fore last with a friend. I walked all last night—all to-day so far. Guess I'll have to go back to the hospital."

"Better come along with me, then," the officer suggested, not unkindly. "'Twon't hurt you none. They won't charge you with anything but vagrancy."

The girl looked about as if her pale, bewildered eyes might help her to understand.

As she turned, the crowd parted instinctively at Margarita's approach.

"Why must she be arrested?" a gentle voice pleaded.

"No home," the officer answered briefly.

"Perhaps she hasn't had time to find a lodging?"

"No money, either, I expect," the policeman added. "I say" (with a pluck at the girl's arm), "got any money?"

The girl shook her head.

"But if she has money?" Margarita asked, pulling her purse open.

"Oh, well," the officer answered, "that's different. But your kind ain't usually giving anything away. They think they're doing enough when they butt in. Of course, if you want her, she's yours. Only she must get along out of this. Come on, you people; clear the walk!"

In rough and ready fashion he dragged the unresisting girl across the pavement and pushed her

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into Margarita's carriage, closed the door on the pair, and waved a salute to the wrinkled driver.

"I'm so glad," said Margarita, "that he could think quickly like that. I've been sick, like you. I didn't seem to know what to do. And this is very happy: I shall be able to get you into a lovely home—a place where they have pleasant rooms, and wide halls, and good food, and music—where they'll be glad to have you. They just *exist* for the sake of helping those who have been unfortunate."

The girl seemed deaf—or was she merely stupid? So colorless, so lifeless, so utterly unresponsive! But, Margarita reflected, she had just been through an accident,—there was the shock. She contented herself with using her little handkerchief to stanch the blood from the girl's torn ear. And then, while she worked, the girl turned paler than ever and sank back limp on the cushions, her eyes closed in sheer exhaustion.

"I'm very sorry to say that Mrs. Faire is not at home," the maid said on meeting Margarita and her strange companion at the door of the apartment.

"But—but—" Margarita, all excitement, blurted, "I had an appointment with her. At least—it amounted to that."

"She's always out Thursdays," the maid replied. "You might come in and wait, though," she added, with the slightest trace of pity. "I'm expecting her

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every minute. She telephoned a little while ago that she'd be back at a-quarter-to-five to dress for dinner. It's very near that now!"

"Let my friend sit down just a moment," Margarita said, steadying the still helpless figure into Mrs. Faire's reception room. "We won't wait for Mrs. Faire; but if you had a drop of brandy——"

For the moment Margarita was quite as helpless herself. She suddenly realized her own weakness. And the announcement that Mrs. Faire was not at home,—why had that come like a dark, heavy blow? Could it be—? But, no!— Mrs. Faire was too sweet, too pure, too utterly free from deceit.

The maid was a long while coming with the brandy.

Then,—there was a rustle in the hallway, and Mrs. Faire herself bustled in.

"Oh, my dear!" she burst out, as soon as her eyes, becoming accustomed to the dimmer light, discovered Margarita; and in an instant she had folded the girl in her arms and kissed her with the old delicious rapture. "How lucky I am to have come when I did! I have been out ever since lunch, and hadn't intended coming back so early. But an offhand invitation to dinner brought me home to dress. Why didn't you let me know?"

"I did," said Margarita, "but you were out. Mrs. Pursse answered the telephone and told me that you

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would be home all day. It was very careless of me, no doubt—" she added.

"Very careless of Louise to forget to mention it to me. However, it has turned out happily. And whom have we here?" she asked, turning to the figure which she had been exploring in a darkened corner.

The girl, who lay with her head thrown back in a chair and very pale, her picture-hat sadly awry, roused herself ever so slightly. She was still like a person under narcotics. But she offered no word, only returning Mrs. Faire's scrutiny with dull, emotionless eyes.

"I'm afraid I'll have to talk for her," Margarita explained, approaching the girl and stroking her pale temple. "She's been very sick, and she's been walking all night because she had no money. She grew faint, I think, crossing a street, and she was struck by a cab-horse. See,—where it's torn her ear! And they were going to arrest her, but I pled for her. I knew you would be glad to have her. She's one of your helpless ones, you know——"

But she could get no further. Such a change had come over the beautiful little lady! Her figure had grown tense; her face harder than any face the Princess had ever seen before,—among men, among criminals, among the desperately, bitterly poor! It was hard as a diamond. Her eyes glittered basilisk-like.

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"But I can't have her here!" she exclaimed, with a cruel eloquence. She indicated the beautiful but empty rooms in a gesture of unspeakable scorn. There was no mistaking her now. She was like a soldier,—her little chest squared to the conflict. She was fighting in defense of the sacredness of her home. She was defending the things she lived for from the insinuation of an enemy.

The Princess fell back before her. Some leaden thing had struck at the base of her brain. She was conscious of being sick, giddy, feverish; but consternation, a sense of unfathomable trickery, and a perfectly overwhelming revulsion kept her up. Her mouth dropped open nevertheless.

"You mean to say——?" she gasped.

"I mean to say that this is a lady's private dwelling, not a police-station, or a house of detention. You should have let the officer take her to court, where her case could have been determined, and she could have been assigned to the proper place. There are paid workers at all of the courts, you know."

"Oh-h-h!" A long exclamation, half understanding, half a groan, escaped the Princess. At last she had gotten Mrs. Faire's viewpoint,—just a glimpse.

With that long sigh, Mrs. Faire relaxed a bit. "But, of course," she went on, "I can send her to the Martha Home. Oh, yes; I'll be very glad to do that. I'll give her my card, and directions,—and——"

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But Margarita had turned away. The realization that had come in something less than sixty seconds had so utterly stricken her world with ruin that she was conscious of tottering as she walked. In a window-embasure, behind thick curtains, she was only vaguely conscious of what went on in the room. There she bit her lips, . . . repressed tears, . . . strove with the deadly nausea that had seized her, . . . tried to understand.

She was aroused by Mrs. Faire's pleading face thrust between the curtains. As instantly as she had lost it, Mrs. Faire had recovered her old sweet smile, her pleasant, sprightly voice.

"There, there!" she cooed, as though she had been soothing an infant. "Don't feel badly about it,—please don't. I've sent her away——"

Margarita wheeled on her, afame from head to foot.

"*You sent her away!*" she screamed. "You——!"

With fists whitely clenched she started to rush past, but Mrs. Faire caught her and clung to her.

"My dear child! Please don't be angry with me."

"You—you sent her away?" The girl's little fist was raised as if to smite, but she had no such intention. "You sent her——"

"To the Martha Home."

Margarita tore herself from the woman now and rushed into the hall, only to meet the grinning maid returning, with

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"She's gone, Miss, safe enough."

"Gone—? Gone—?" The girl turned distractedly about. She was beside herself now. Mrs. Faire was coming into the hall. Her face, though slightly flushed, had never been more angelic, more sweetly pleading, her manner more delicate, her eyes more calmly pure.

"Oh! How can I get out of this horrid place?" Margarita pleaded.

"There's the stairs, Miss," said the maid, indicating a staircase behind the elevator-shaft.

Instantly the Princess whirled and was gone. She remembered afterward that Mrs. Faire was saying something, but she hadn't the slightest idea what.

XIII

HOW could the girl have disappeared so suddenly? The Princess hurried along the lamp-lit street in the direction she should have taken, to the nearest car-line. Then, not finding her, she flew back and examined the side streets. It was not until she had hurried into every nearby street, scrutinized every moving figure, that she resigned her search. She had no notion that the girl, even if she would, could find her way to the Martha Home; but she stepped into her cab now, directing her driver to take her there.

"There has been no girl here this afternoon," said the crisp, cool figure in glasses, a glittering gold cross dangling at her waist, that stood at the head of the steps in the Martha Home looking down at Margarita. "We couldn't have taken her in, if there had been. We're full to the doors now."

"But if she comes, you will keep her here and telephone me?" the Princess besought.

Late into the night she kept hoping against hope that the girl might turn up. How she would have loved to tend that poor, helpless thing!—to share

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her bed with her, to bind her wound, to help her back to life and hope. And she had dropped back into the city's life and been lost like a stone in the inky midnight river!

It would have meant so much to Margarita, too. It would have saved her the wild sorrow of that night. Left to herself, wearied with excitement as she was, and passionately, bitterly disappointed, the occurrences of the afternoon rehearsed themselves in insufferable succession. It was as if she must feel again and again the exquisite pain of that awakening. In one horrid moment she had lost not only a friend, but an ideal. Worst, most painful of all, was the realization that the woman had never really been a friend. What then? The girl who loved her so had been but a common nuisance to her, had bored her, annoyed her, with the cloying, mawkish devotion of a child, of a slack-wit! The thought searched out Margarita's pride and turned her deathly sick.

She understood now that little incident—that exclamation of impatience she had heard through the screen-doors in the summer. She realized the meaning of the repeated rebuffs she had met in visiting Mrs. Faire's apartment; saw through the contemptible trickery of Mrs. Purse's inviting her to come on a day when Mrs. Faire was sure to be out; read afresh the little look of pity the lady's maid had thrown her that afternoon. But it was all so incredible! How could she have loved so mean a crea-

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ture? How could a person she had loved be so unspeakable?

She swayed between wrath and loathing.

Something seemed due herself. She could not weep; the thing lay too deep for tears. In her distraction she turned to her desk and began to write—at first hurriedly, passionately, bitterly. Why had the woman been at such pains to deceive her? . . . She had flung off a note: now she stopped to read it over. Its wild language frightened her. She thrust it into the waste-basket at her feet, only one corner leaning out into the light, with but the one word glaring upon it,

“—false-hearted.”

As the torrent of her grief assuaged a little, she wrote more calmly—a long, careful letter, in which she tried to suppress the burning anger and resentment that she knew had mastered her. Between times she sat long, trying to understand. Mrs. Faire *could* not be such a cheap little trickster as she seemed; there must be some other way of understanding her that would put her in a better light. She had merely tried to conceal her contempt for Margarita, and had overdone it. She had used only the conventional tricks for getting rid of a bore;—there was no blame in that. No, the only charge to be laid against her was that she had defeated her own purpose by a too great show of kindness. But

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even that was of the purely conventional sort. . . . What it all came to in the end was that she had seemed like too sincere a person ever to need that sort of thing. And so Margarita wrote:

"If only you had not made a pose of sincerity!"

But when that was written in black and white, and stood glaring before her, she knew that she could never accuse any one of a thing so terrible. And she knew that it was not true of Mrs. Faire.

So, as the hours wore on, the Princess came to herself. By a process of accusation and elimination, she saw that Mrs. Faire was not at fault at all. She had made no real attempt to deceive. It had all been in the girl herself,—so hungry to pour out her love on some one,—so eager to believe! And Mrs. Faire, the most frankly artificial little bit of bisque in the world, had been the victim of her idealization—that was all.

When that realization came, the Princess threw herself upon her bed with a sense of great relief. She no longer thought so meanly of the soul she had loved with such eagerness, but a few hours before. If it had cost her drops of blood, it had saved one whom she had loved. She remembered Harry Guex and his pitiful little expression. "She's just another of the children—at play," she whispered to herself.

Poor little Princess! It is not impossible now to understand her heartbreak. She had made an idol

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of a bit of common clay, and when the pretty thing had crumbled at her touch, her heart broke with it, and she lay crushed in the dust. She had loaded the virtues of an angel onto a humming-bird. She had made something sublime of what was essentially ridiculous, and her poor romantic heart must pay the penalty. Mrs. Faire had been quite frank and unmistakable. She desired admiration. She could not bear the loss of it, for it was her daily food. And if the little creature had nothing but counterfeit to give in return for the pure gold of devotion that was laid at her feet,—why, that was a tragical circumstance for which she was more to be pitied than condemned.

XIV

POOR little Princess! If only she could have loved the woman less utterly! But that was not in her. For there can be no doubt that the collapse of her idol played a critical part in the complete breakdown that came that following spring. I think that only the intensity of resolution with which she snatched herself up from immediate disaster carried her through the intervening weeks. Certainly she presented a brave face to the world, insisted that she was growing stronger every day, went back to her work at the settlement and held herself to it with a perfectly iron resolution.

But, quite naturally, when the breakdown came it was more complete. People had gotten a way of looking at her askance, and whispering under their hands when her back was turned. Settlement workers would take her by the arm and ask: "Aren't you going beyond your strength, dear?" Mr. and Mrs. Snowden looked grave, talked about her much in private, urged her to plan for rest. But she only looked at them all in amazement, and said: "Why, dear people, don't you know that this is my *life*—

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what little there is of it? Turning away from it would be like fleeing into the arms of Death."

Only that tough cable of resolution held, while dark waters lapped at the foundation-stones and sucked them down into their murky tide. At each lower level of physical depression she was conscious of seeing things with a new clearness, a fresh bitterness. Fresh condemnations descended upon her head. She was *so* out of touch with the world!—so unable to understand, to share their joys, such as they were, to enter into the little automatic grind, with all its small comforts and easements—for, after all, the rut was a comfortable kind of thing.

She envied people their rightness,—their sureness (or was it a kind of skill?) in fitting so neatly and exactly into the places they did fit into. Apparently, the smaller they were the more perfectly they fitted each into his little place in the cosmogram. And the more perfectly they fitted the happier they were,—of course. She had never been like that. She had never been quite contented, except as she thought of things leading to something else. She wondered whether she had ever enjoyed any single day, except as it was lighted by the hope of new and better days. . . . People, then, were almost without exception so much better than she—! They would *fit in*: she never could. They were willing to put aside their dreams, their plans, even their hopes, and make the best of things-as-they-were. She realized sud-

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denly that she had wickedly clung to hers, like a selfish little girl who wouldn't give up her dolls. Were they, then—those other people—so much braver, so much more selfless than she? . . . But no!—not braver; for holding her philosophy of life had never been easy. It had cost her much to believe and cling fast to such foolish hopes. It had kept her from enjoying life in the simple, easy way those others did. It had made all the furore in her mind; it had kept her in an everlasting ferment; it was that which racked her body and brought the fever.

She wondered if she had unconsciously gone sour—whether her idealism had become mere discontent and made her unlovely—whether she had been planting seeds of this kind of thing; just strewing incipient misery for others as she went. Why couldn't she put away all the fine dreaming and just face the thing, as simple, as debonair, or as phlegmatic, as the others?

Perhaps that was why they hated her!—for one of the strange disillusionments of her life had been discovering that many people had always hated her, before they knew her, before she was born, and apparently always would. They would run in—say at the settlement library—strange, new faces; glare at her a moment, as if to make sure she were the person, curl the lip meaningly, then rush away again. How strange it was!—she who had never hated any one, who couldn't imagine how it was done. Of

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course, she didn't see anything in them to love particularly, but she blamed herself greatly for that, and tried hard, and thought that she did succeed a little in loving, or at least in pitying, their lovelessness. Yet nothing could be surer than that they detested her. And that was one of the facts she had been cowardly about recognizing.

She thought often of young Rosinsky, the Russian Jew. He was, in a way, a type of the whole problem, as he bustled, or rather glittered, into the library just before she left at seven, having hurried from his place in the big overall factory, snatching a bite of indigestible lunch at the wagon on the corner on the way! And now he was after the medical books again, the chemistry section, the encyclopedias. How hard he was!—he glittered entirely,—his crisp black hair glittered, his nervous eyes, his nose-glasses, his white teeth, even his smile, his mind, his movements, his heart— But he had no heart! He was so keenly eager for science: he thought medicine the most loosely organized of all the sciences, and he meant to master it. But when she spoke of human life, of souls, he smiled his hard, brilliant smile.

“Just limitless stuff to experiment on,” he snapped out, stretching his long white hands out of his cuffs in a suggestive movement. “What we want is facts, —nothing but facts.”

She was conscious of fighting with him—uselessly. Not their bodies, but their spirits. When he ap-

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peared in the library doorway she was conscious of being seized, buffeted, hustled, and of bracing herself, struggling for the right to be what she was. He was laughing at her; he would have torn her to pieces, thrown her away,—a silly thing of naught, for the sheer sport of his science. . . . But he was so happy, so *sure*; and she so unhappy, so lost!

Most of the settlement habitués were like that, she saw in morbid moments—pushing, aggressive, self-helpful. The Mrs. Slavin's, the Mrs. Bernstein's, the Schrecksky's, the Martinello's in the Mother's Club, the little Isadors and Katrinas and Josephs,—the older boys in their noisy debating clubs, the fat or sullen-looking men in their smoky labor-forums. They were all the sort who take care of themselves wherever they are placed, and the whole settlement movement was only a refined opportunity for their pushing propensities. It was all built on that hard libel on divinity, that "the Lord helps those who help themselves." But somewhere out beyond it all, she still felt, were the helpless—millions of them,—the people who respond to love,—love only, and love penniless. Oh, how surely she would go to them, if only the foundation-stones weren't being swept away!

Last and worst of the demon-thoughts that afflicted her, she grew querulous of her fellow-workers —of all the philanthropic horde. They were a class

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by themselves,—people of gifts, people of wealth, people who had a talent for seeming at ease with all sorts and conditions of men,—people who liked to play with the Divine Legend, to be beggars for a moment (but only in appearance) that they might have a memorable adventure of being a shopgirl, or a tramp, or an outcast. They were people who didn't naturally care for horse-racing or yachting, as the sport group did; or for the arts, as another group did; or for mutual adoration, like the four hundred; but they simply must have some excuse for cultivating one another—something to hold pink teas over. And certainly the demon who whispered that was not wholly ignorant of human affairs. It came to this:—what the old world needed was something finer than philanthropy.

As an early, soppy springtide opened, however, she became too ill to care, and was obliged to put the world aside for better, for worse. Two or three sudden warm days drew her strength away. The foundations went out. She had thrown herself down that night utterly exhausted. She was aware, some time during the long stillness, of a warm fluid flowing from her lips, but not greatly disturbed. She wakened in the morning to find a dark stain on her pillow.

By the time she was strong enough to stand moving they had made plans for her.

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"It will be far up in the beautiful mountains," her mother whispered; "far away from the noise, and filth, and—care. . . . There is a pretty little cottage—just big enough for two. I have seen it myself. . . . Daddy and I will be not far away, and I can spend much of my time with you,—perhaps most. And there will be a nurse—we are trying to get Miss MacMorran—who will live with you all the time till you are better. Then, there is the big farmhouse where you will eat, and several guests there already. And such a view of the wide world from your eyrie!" The eyes that beamed above the girl were wet with tenderness. Mrs. Snowden was trying hard to make her look forward with joy to her exile.

Margarita laid white fingers on her mother's hand.

"Why can't it be Mamma K.?" she asked.

"But, suppose you need medical care?"

"I shall not need so much if I can have those about me whom I love. We poor take care of one another that way, you know."

There was something stinging in the unconscious reproof, which made Mrs. Snowden's tears break.

"My dear child!" she protested, "'All that I have is thine.'"

By this time Bridget was married, and already had two children; Tim also had set up a household

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of his own; Grandma Dowd's old eyes had at last grown shut entirely—in the sleep that will not rouse; Mattie was working out, with board for part pay. The Kernochans had long since left the slate-colored shack in the clay-banks. When Mrs. Snowden's letter came Mamma K. sat down and wept by her washtub. The thought of her so-sick baby was too much. And it was only when the Princess looked up into her bony face again and knew that she would be with her that she could look forward to her new home with a smile.

THAT was indeed a wide world that lay spread out below her eyes,—green mantles and blue velvety carpets in infinite soft luxury, reaching far out to the blue rim of the world—the faery touch upon it all. She was conscious that gentle winds were drifting up to her out of all the world, just to touch her cheek tenderly, coolingly; that all the sweet sky ached with compassion above her. The squalor and the noise and the care were gone. She had resigned herself so utterly, and nature was lifting her with strong arms. Each day she could walk a few steps further (on the porch) without *those hands* dragging her down! Then, at length, she could step down until her foot pressed the mystic earth again. Oh, how beautiful it was! And now she could walk abroad once more.

“Young Allspin was telling me this morning,”

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said Mamma K., "how it was that they first come to think this would be a good place for people like you. They were poor enough at farming until a crazy German fellow with a knapsack on his back came along and wanted them to keep him. He had this trouble, too, it seems. . . . He was one of these wild fellows that want to blow everybody up, and they were scared of their life of him. But he was too sick to do much harm; and besides they watched him pretty close——"

"An anarchist, I suppose," Margarita mused.

"No,—not that. At least, that wasn't the name he said."

"A socialist, then, perhaps."

"Yes, that's it. One of them wild-eyed fellows."

Margarita smiled.

"He died up here," Angie went on. "But he paid his board, and left enough for his funeral expenses. And the last thing he did was to paint a little wooden cross for himself. He's buried somewhere on top of that cliff up there. It was his crazy notion."

With wooing weather, Margarita's feeble steps ventured further. Down along the cow-pasture, out through the piney grove. She could always sink down in some mossy sconce to rest. The world was so widely beautiful she wanted to see it again from higher up. The strain of mounting was very great, but little by little she could gain slight emin-

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ences, and from every new height the world was more beautiful, fainter, farther, more mystically soft. She loved that softness, as she always had, with tear-dimmed eyes. If only her hopes had not been so utterly ruined out there beyond those misty veils!

Perhaps there had been a trace of the old excitement that day which nerved her unduly. Certainly the air was invigorating, inspiring. At any rate, she pressed on, venturing ever higher, a little careless of the fever that beat in her cheek. She had gained a kind of overgrown pasture, but it was disappointing. Tall trees shut off the view. The sun burned glaringly next the cool shelter of the wood, little wandering paths invited her—sheep-tracks through the brush. Somewhere in the deep woods a hermit thrush invited too; and further along she thought the mountains rounded, and the trees looked thinner. It was thus her steps were led, until, surprised by sudden weakness, she sank down at the edge of a little clearing which broke off with a leap into space. What a flawless sky curtained the opening! While she lay there panting a white-headed eagle swam by,—a serene ship, level with her eyes.

She had lain there a long while before she noticed something white among dwarfed shrubs. But instantly she recognized it. This was the top of the "clift," where that terrible German lay buried; and that was the little wooden cross he had painted for

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his memory. She lay still, thinking about him, wondering if she could have seen any good in him behind that terrible front,—thinking of him as large and blustering, repellent. He must have been a bushy-headed ogre, to frighten them all like that; no doubt he had a voice of thunder and made subterranean rollings in his throat, as Germans do. . . . It was long before she crept slowly down to sit opposite the little monument.

Rain and weather had all but obliterated its lettering. The name, which had been written in large block letters, was all gone, save a flake here and there to show the outline of a character. Singularly enough, the slighter German text above and below remained more perfect. She could half-decipher, half-guess,

“Hier ruhet”.

Yes, here if anywhere, one might rest, undisturbed by mortal footfall, or sigh, or cry drifting in out of that oceanic blueness. Only the soughing of the forest-trees behind—

And then below she picked out.

T, r, — T, r, a, u, — T, r, a, u, — t, Träumt!
—obviously,

“— er träumt.”

It was some time then before she could guess the long word which preceded, but happily at last it

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slipped into her mind: "Vielleicht!" Ah, that was it—a memory of Shakespeare:

"Vielleicht er träumt."

So this wild fellow knew his Shakespeare! And behind all his rude, ogre-like exterior lay, as she had more than half suspected, the memory of dreams, the hope of them!

Was it the nature of these thoughts that turned memory back upon Otto and the bookshop? Though the westering sun was already speeding, she gave herself up to the luxury of lying back and living it all over again, till she was quite faint with the beauty that could never be.

Suddenly she sat up sharply. A cold gust had struck her. But she was leaning now to the little cross, studying hard, with knitted brows. That name!—would it not glow from the little white oblong shape before her? That first letter,—was it a C or an O?—and what was the width of the characters? And that stroke at the end!

Slowly, carefully, her eye traversed the little space. Slowly she pieced it out. Every least trace of paint had at last fitted into place. She could read it now, in despite of wind and weather, and all the years:

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Hier ruhet
OTTO LILIENTHAL
Vielleicht er träumt.

She was careless now of the sinking sun, of the growing wind, of the chill in the earth. Feelings too great for her frail body overmastered her. She sank down in tears. She sank down in weakness. She was glad in some wild, weird way, and wanted to fall asleep up there.

"Oh, Otto," she murmured, as she crept near and laid her lips against the little weather-worn cross. "And to think that this is all it comes to! After all the dreaming, and believing, and hoping, and wandering over half the world, we meet here at the borders of the Kingdom,—you just there, and I here, and only a step between us!"

That was the night when, for the second time, morning showed that dark stain upon her pillow.

XV

THEY had not mentioned her illness to Paul, hoping that she might be better before they would need to write again. But with the second break they thought best to inform him of her desperate condition. She had written to him,—gay, cheery little letters,—in which she had represented herself as dawdling, loitering, between work and play. It was so she explained her “vacations,” and he had wondered much at her. Now he suddenly understood. And quite in his old impetuous way he sold his broncho and took the first train east. Something of the girl’s loyalty had crept in next his heart. He knew how instantly she would have come to him from the ends of the earth, and he wanted to be near her now.

As yet, though, he had no idea of the pallor, the utter weakness, the hopeless look that would confront him. From him the year on the range had taken away the last vestige of the Oxonian, the dilettante, and left only a strong man, brown, muscular, keen for life, zestful, happy. Good health smiled in his eyes, flamed in his hair. A rich golden bronze

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overlay the peach-blown complexion, which still blushed quick as of old,—still left him open to twittering pleasantries. He was good to look upon as he stood framed in the doorway of the Princess's bed-chamber. But, *she*—! He could not suppress the feeling of pain that smote him as he smiled down at her.

"Oh, dear boy," she said, "they shouldn't have let you see me!" Instantly the white skein that was her hand was over her eyes. "But you!—Oh, it is so good to see you again."

There was a fearsome fascination about her which, coupled with his fear of bringing fresh embarrassment to her, brought him most often when she was in those long trance-like sleeps. If Mamma K. assured him that she was not awake, he would slip noiselessly into the cottage, gently push her door open enough to let him pass, and stand gazing down at her,—to him an eternal wonder wrought in snow. The touch of blue about the brow and throat, the light lines in her hand! The rich hair lying like a cloud about that white head! The thought of her great-orbed eyes lying so closed! The imperceptible breathing! And when he thought of all the pretty, poignant faithfulness that sank with her there,—the unabashed dreaming, the gentle constancy, he turned away with suffocation in his throat.

Out in the piney grove, where he had pitched the

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tent they loaned him, he tried to thresh it all out. Now that she was slipping away, the sense of loss came upon him—at first a dull ache, then an intense longing.

“God!” he said, “she’s my little sister. Why can’t she stay?”

He came back again to a sense of great loneliness. The afternoon light that lay along the hills had grown red, sickly. The whole world looked cold. He could never again take a delight in trees, blue sky, red earth, or flashing waters. He was beginning to realize that she had taught him the fine things, the beautiful things, that through her, and her alone, he had seen goodness, hopefulness, truth. He arose, then, with something like imprecation in his voice, exclaiming: “And then you take her from me!”

Day by day he plucked new hope for her, and always, as he sallied down to the cottage, he promised himself better news. But always the news was the same.

“No better,” Mrs. Kernochan would say, shaking her head.

And then one day she added, more confidentially, “You couldn’t really expect it, Mr. Snowden, could you? The trouble is, her heart’s broke. She always was a frail-like little thing, always wantin’ to love somebody. And you know how the world is?—too rough and mean for anybody like that. If she

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only had the heart now, I think she could rally up out of it. She was doing nicely before she climbed so far that day. But since that she don't seem to want to. She only smiles so sweet and happy-like when I talk to her about getting up. I guess she's through with it all."

He turned back, without seeing Margarita, rebellious against God and angry at Mrs. Kernochan. He had not suspected before that she didn't want to get up. That set something trembling in his breast. He returned to his tent, and in the solitude lay down on the pine-needles. The feeling was like a wound. He could endure the mere thought of death,—her death even. But this, he knew, was something more. He wanted her. And the more hopeless his sorrow seemed, the more his heart reached out for her. Now, in her baby helplessness, he longed to pick her up in his arms, to give her life,—that life that was so thrabbing in himself, to keep her and cherish her forever. It was the thought that she had consented to the going that burned in him a wretched, helpless pain. If only he could make her say once that she would like to stay—for him!

In the morning he went down to her after a restless night. There was nobody about the tiny cottage, and he went in. At her chamber-door he paused, tapping very lightly so as not to waken her if she slept, listening for her light whisper. There was no sound, and he pressed the door open and slipped

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in. She lay stretched crosslike on the bed, as though sleep had been bad, her face turned away, one white hand hanging over the bedside near him. How exquisite she was in her white beauty! . . . There he lost himself. He was hardly aware of the tears that blinded him. He was down on one knee, pressing the little hand to his lips. He wondered that she did not waken, but the warmth of life was in the thin hand, and he let its fingers lie against his big brown palm while he thrilled with the wonder of their touch. Then,

"God, dear God!" escaped his lips in a soft moaning cry. "If it's possible, let—her—live! Marjie, Mousie, sweetheart," he went on, whispering. "I'm here,—Paul,—praying for you. Mousie, do rally up!—get well!"

He touched her fingers once again, his lips brushing them lightly as thistle-down, and then he rose and hurried from the room, thankful that she had not stirred.

"I am so glad that you came this afternoon," she said. "I do so enjoy your visits, and knowing that you are always near. It is two whole days since you came."

"It is good to see you bolstered up," he answered. "That looks better—much."

Her eyes flashed with a trace of her old sweet merriment.

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"I shall soon be out of here," she said. "I am going to be on my feet before the week's out." She smiled again, seeing his amazement.

"You don't understand," she went on. "Of course, you wouldn't. I've had a dream,—a visitation—like the saints of old, in the Golden Legend. I was—somewhere—I don't know where; but I was very happy, quite contented. And then I heard a voice, as plainly as I hear your voice, Paul,—calling me back. And behind that voice there seemed to be others, and others, oh, a lot of them, somewhere in the distance. And I'm—I'm *coming!* All through the night, it seemed, some one was speaking to me, and I was intolerably happy. I kept saying, over and over, to myself: 'My own shall come to me.' Wasn't it strange? But it has made me want to get well."

"But you are very sick," he remonstrated gently. "You must guard against excitement just now."

"Sickness is nothing," she said in a large, quaint way. "What is sickness if somebody wants you? And it seemed so real— Oh, I am quite satisfied. If it doesn't leave me now—" she added more softly, with the first merest trace of doubt.

"It *is* real," he said, fingering her little hand. "It won't leave you again. I'm—I'm sure it won't."

"You know about it, then?" Her eyes opened wide in wonderment.

There was the old curious look of trying to under-

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stand—of groping and trying to fasten dreams to earth. "You—you really know—something?" she pleaded.

"Just an inkling here and there," he said, "not enough to talk about, really. Only I know it's true. You see, we all want you. Everybody wants you. The old world would be so much poorer without you. We just couldn't let you go. You're our—our Princess."

"Can't you tell me ever so little?" she wheedled.

But he only smiled. "Not now," he said. "We must wait until you are stronger. *À la bonne heure.*"

She sank back, then, with a contented sort of smile, but her brown eyes still studied his face, their lights changing, their color brightening to sweet hazel, aglow, or darkening to deep, rayless pools, according as mystery, hope, a fleeting trace of despair, or serene content played through the chambers of her mind. She seemed afraid to smile, for her smile was so guileless, so free, so unprotected—so like *herself*. He was more than ever self-conscious, and his eyes kept fleeing from hers, and his peach-blow color beat up under the bronze—he was embarrassed, blushing, awkward as a schoolboy. His head seemed loosely hung, and his big knees wandered around aimlessly. But she attributed all that to the secret he was keeping from her. And she ceased looking at him, and closed her eyes, and sank

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back in her pillows. Now he could gaze at her fearlessly. He saw little smiles framing themselves about the corner of her mouth, in the angles of her eyes,—little smiles forever changing, forever deepening, as if light caresses were brushing away every last trace of pain and weakness and doubt,—composing themselves in a kind of ordered disarray—making a nest for her head. She had not moved her hand. It still lay in his, as if it liked to be there. She loved the warm, calm strength of his big fingers, the firmness and dryness of his brown skin, the sense it carried of sinewy power.

In the days that followed he was consumed by a boyish eagerness to tell her everything in one wild outburst. He was so happy. It stood out as something incredible, terrible, that the one half-profané prayer which had burst from his lips had been answered. At least, there could be no doubt that her vision had followed swiftly on that wild, distracted thing, and he was content to question no further. Only he knew that it meant subtle, deep changes in his nature. He was no longer sure of himself, of the world, of nature,—and science was a very little thing. Everything hung now by her,—that frail, bedridden wisp. And she did not fail him. She could not. She was coming back—and oh! her smile was so bright,—such pure and perfect innocence and happiness,—a thing to keep with all his strength, a thing to defend with all his might. And

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he watched her return as one might watch the approach of a blind person, groping toward him but not knowing how.

"Isn't it strange, Paul," she said, "that I should be so happy,—and I don't know why?"

"But *I* do," he said, and the quizzical smile that played round his mouth and the peach-blow color that came and went piqued her beyond endurance.

"Then do be generous," she said, "and tell me."

He teased her just a moment longer with silence.

"It's because," he said, "your dreams are coming true, or at least some of them are. You are going to be free, and there's going to be a way—a way to touch people as you've always wanted to do,—along the lines laid down by this Rosenthal,—you know,—your old bookseller——"

"Lilienthal," she corrected softly.

"Oh, yes. Well, his ideas—the Kingdom and the Prince. You have a genius for that kind of thing. There's to be a place where you can get your people together,—Mamma K. and all the rest of them. You'll need help, of course. But it's to be all for you, and all about you. It's to be the touch of your fingers, in the last analysis."

Her eyes were wide now with happiness and amazement.

"But *how?*" she asked. "You're not telling me."

"It's very simple," he went on. "So simple, in fact, that it hardly needs explaining. The details

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are being worked out by a practical man, who will report later."

"I'm almost afraid," she trembled, "you are making sport of me."

There *was* a trace of pain in her voice, and immediately he took alarm. He knew that if one false note slipped in, it would undo all the work of rebuilding which had begun. He had been so happy in watching her grow stronger day by day. And he knew it was his hand she was holding by. Yet he dreaded the shock of avowal.

"It's all rather strange," he said, blushing and floundering a little. "You see, we began this story back-end-to, the way novel-readers do. We wanted to be sure that the climax was good. Now we've got to go back to the beginning. Haven't you noticed the least thing odd lately?"

"Odd? About what?—about whom?"

He was coloring now so helplessly that she could no longer be blind to his embarrassment.

"Why, er—the truth is, Mousie, I'm in love."

She looked more than ever mystified. This was indeed a strange story.

"Oh-h-h!" she said, her eyes very dark, very wondering.

"Haven't you noticed it?" he asked, blushing scarlet.

"Why, Paul!" she gasped. "No; I hadn't noticed. But *now* I see it. You—you've taken me so

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by surprise. And it must have cost you so much to tell me. But I'm glad you are—oh, I'm very glad!—”

She had recovered herself quickly, and though it was still evident that she didn't see any connection, she was running along with him, happy because he was happy, proud because he had shared his proud secret with her.

“Is it someone that you really, truly love, with all your heart, this time?”

“Really, truly,” he smiled, “with all my heart of hearts.”

“And is she simple, and true, and genuine? You know, Paul, I didn't ever want you to have Virginia.”

“She is simple as a wood flower,” he went on, “and as pure and sweet. She's like some clear woodland spring, where you see everything as in a crystal, but touched with rainbow lights.”

She listened with evident pleasure.

“I'm so glad for you,” she said ecstatically, pressing his big fingers. “Tell me her name now and see if I like that, too.”

He leaned over, whispering in her ear. And then she was quite still a moment, as if she had not understood. The quick color beat up in her pallid throat and cheek, though, and her eyes widened with happiness, amusement, disbelief.

“*Me!*” she cried. “Who,—me? Why, Paul——” There was the strangest incredulity mixed in her

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pleasure. "You can't mean it. Why, just look at me!" and she stretched out her transparent hands and arms, where their blue-veined marble was only too apparent. "How could anybody be in love with me? It's—it's——"

But the look of his face had grown so tender, so mystical, so wonderfully, quietly happy,—it was her answer, and it was more convincing than many words.

"But, oh, Paul," she said, and she was speaking now to the new, suddenly-changed Paul, whose happiness burned like a holy mystery before her; "what if I shouldn't be able to return your love, as lovers are supposed to do? I haven't any of that funny feeling, or whatever it is, that people in love are supposed to have."

The pretty gesture she made was one of very genuine concern and wistfulness. But he only sat and smiled down at the coverlid. It was plain that he was very sure, and very happy. Just to look upon her and see her facing upward, so brave, so happy, yet so terrified, toward the big new something that was coming—it was all he asked.

"You're all the world to me," he went on, as if he were free now to say what he would. "You're just a little pinky arbutus in a snow-bank—the first flower in a wintry world. And I love you,—I love you more than I can tell because you're like that, and the killing cold may come suddenly and pinch you

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out,—and then there won't be any—any flowers in
the world."

She sank back wearily into her pillows, but very
happy. The little smiles gathered again to make a
nest for her head. Her fingers crept across the
counterpane until they found and rested in his.

"There aren't going to be any more killing frosts,"
she said.

XVI

THOSE were golden days that followed: for Paul, mystical, hazardous days—days of wonderful new realizations, hoped for with the naïvete of a boy, but met tremulously, and received with the utter and increasing bewilderment of a grown man set in unbelieving ways. *He had prayed*, —in an hysterical moment. And that prayer had been answered! There was something about him that wanted to laugh, something that wanted to fall on his knees in adoration:—and he couldn't do either. Every morning he woke to doubt, but every day brought him a fresh miracle of regeneration in the happy eyes of the Princess. It was as if angels persisted in laying things at his feet,—his, who had so consistently made sport of angels. It was uncomfortable, but glorious! . . . That light in her eyes was quite enough. That smile of hers, bearing such a deep content, as though not only her own troubles but all the troubles in the world had passed away; that happiness that seemed to go back to the eternities and forward endlessly (so like a little child); that trusting him with such unfathomable

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helplessness, simplicity—they were quite enough. He was content to be made ridiculous by a life which he had treated with contempt.

She was able to be moved now, and it was his great privilege to carry her. Mrs. Kernochan wanted to do it, but she put Mamma K. gently aside and said Paul would,—whereupon Angie looked a question—startled, affronted, a little jealous.

"It isn't as if he was your own brother," she said, with the slightest reproach. But the Princess only smiled unabashed.

"I know," she answered; "but he's strong. And he won't mind."

She was light,—pitifully light,—but when he gathered up the bundle of wraps in the midst of which she lay, he felt as though he bore all the gold, all the rare, sweet-scented things in the world. And when she leaned so against his heart, it leaped more suddenly than if he had met a grizzly on the range. Setting her little slippers upon a hassock was a ceremonial, a rite. He was quite content.

But it irked her greatly that she had none of the wild, sweet ecstasies of love for him. She was sweetest when she worried about it.

"What if I should turn out to be a cold, hard, loveless thing, Paul?" she said. "And all your tenderness to me just gobbled up, consumed unquestion-

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ingly, by an appetite that grew more utterly selfish every day? Wouldn't it be terrible?"

"Very," he said, with his imperturbable calm.

"I don't think you take it very seriously," she answered soberly. "Don't you want me to love you?"

He hastened to recover himself then.

"Perhaps," he said, "it would be best for me to go back west for another year. It would enable me to treat the problem more seriously; and it would help you, too. You know, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder.'"

But instantly her face fell.

"Perhaps," she mused. "But what if I should need you suddenly? It might come any day—this thing."

She could look upon him through veiled, resting lids with keen and varying pleasure,—especially when he could take her back into the pines where his tent was. His fine, sinewy strength, his physical beauty, showed so picturesque on that background. And all the knack of woodcraft with which he entertained her had its pungent, fragrant charm. What a lithe grace, what a calm strength was in him!—the essence of bright dawns and star-swept nights on the plains,—the essence of wide, oh-so-wide, clear spaces, and heights, and burning sands, and quiet camps by little water-courses.

He had such tales to tell, too; such people to draw, such fresh romance to spread. To the trained

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faculties of the university man he had added the story-telling gift of men who never read,—the only real story-tellers. They had mellowed him, those men out there,—made him big, and generous, and genial. And now something was making him tender.

She wanted to love him like a god!—but she only loved him as a big, gentle brother.

“Don’t let it fret you, little sister,” he said. “Most people, when they say they’re in love, mean that they’re eager to have someone in love with them, and they’re going to act like demons if they find it can’t be done. I’m not like that—I’m really in love! Having you is enough for a mucker like me.”

WHEN Autumn came and they knew that she was progressing nicely, the Snowdens left their quarters down the river, and returned to New York. She sent Paul, too, telling him that he must be about the big dream. She and Mamma K. would tuck down in the rifts and blankets of white, and be snow-birds—only she must have snowshoes, and skiis, and a toboggan. And he must come whenever he could. She would be quite happy, knowing what she knew, and—dreaming.

It was in the library of the town house, late one evening, that Paul approached his father. The faint aroma of soft leather, where rows of rich books lined the room with a varicolored beauty, sweet-

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ened the atmosphere like flowers; on the hearth an old log simmered red. The Eminent Novelist, more trimly gray, more stately than ever, had laid his book under the lamp beside him, and Mrs. Snowden, a heap of brown and golden sunshine, had curled up in his lap.

"Sire," said the young man, lounging into the room in his smoking-coat and bracing himself before the fire, "I'm on a formal and somewhat important errand to-night."

Mr. Snowden concealed any surprise he may have felt under an exceedingly genial look, and Mrs. Snowden smiled up at his big form like an altogether happy kitten.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, sir. And my profound compliments to Madame, my mother. I have come to ask the hand of your daughter in marriage."

He had had an uneasy feeling that they knew. But he was relieved and amazed when he saw their worlds whirl round. Mrs. Snowden was the first to speak, her face radiant with joy.

"You mean it!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Paul,—you dear, good boy!"

"I'm not good, Mother," Paul stopped her. "Nor any of that mush. Fact is, I've been rather a rotten young bounder. But I'm mending. And all the while she was here, right under my eyes,—the real thing. It's taken me rather a long time to get

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some sense, I know. But it's broken through at last."

"She *is* the real thing," said the Eminent Novelist, with a trace of sadness, perhaps of self-reproach; "the thing we all dream about, and praise, and write about, and—fail to be. But she's as frail as she is rare. I warn you, you'll have to wrap her in cotton. But I admire your courage, sir,—and I—and I bow before your love."

The son stooped courteously as the gray-haired man rose and took his hand.

"But I think, nevertheless, you are wrong, sire," he said reverently. "I mean to take her back and plant her in the muck she came from. She has a genius for touching the humble world, for making her Kingdom and her Prince beautiful to the lowly, the forlorn, the unhappy. And I—I've decided not to be a genius, or a wonder of any kind. It isn't necessary. I shall settle down at the law, and earn the best kind of living I can. I'm to be the good old cart-horse that makes it all possible."

And Mrs. Snowden came close, and said: "Let me kiss you, Paul."

FAR up in the mountains the little girl that couldn't live without her dreams played in the snow. There could be no doubt now about the resolution that bore her slender body up. Only she was infinitely more careful. There were things to live for. The spirit

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watched over the body with jealous concern. But each day she could press it a little farther. . . . She was abroad in every weather. The little snowflakes caressed her cheeks. The wind brought brave assurances. . . . She even had Mamma K. out in the biting cold, tobogganing with her!—Mamma K., looking like a timorous question-mark, and walking with tiny, frightened steps, and rocking herself over her huddled arms.

Then Paul would come swinging in out of the dark, and stamping the snow off, to carry her round like another snowflake, to be her reindeer on the hills, to spend a happy day or two with her. And sometimes she would nestle in his arms like the little frank thing she was.

“I like it,” she said, “and I like *you*. But, mind you, I don’t love you,—yet.”

But he would only smile in his gravely happy way, and trace out the wonder of new health that was coming back so rapidly, and marvel again at the lightening beauty of her glance and the tender pink of her cheeks.

“Why, Mousie,” he said, “there’s gold in your eyes,—laughing gold,—flashing, fugitive gold.”

And, disregarding his wanderings entirely, she would say:

“My Prince! . . . No, I’m older now. I’m a woman—you forget. When I was little I wanted the Prince of Nevercome to come and marry me.

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But I know better now. I must have my earthly Prince."

As the weather warmed the marvel of new life broke in all its wonder. She was one with the singing world. Activity brought no weariness now; rough ways did not tire her. She was not in competition with big, kindly Nature, but Nature was feeding her, jealously guarding her, knitting her strength, filling her with keen, fresh joy.

And over all the sun-wrapt world came up the dreaming and the beauty. Out there where the sky met the hills, out there by the blue rim of the world, it shimmered in the haze, and with night it drifted in, crept up along the hills, submerged her. Oh, it was *just* over there!—the Kingdom. Once or twice she had brought it near in all the bound and bitter days. But now she was to be *free*, and strong —there was such strength back of her, such love, such devotion.

And so she wandered again along woodland ways, to where the hermit thrushes sang, and the shy violet blew, and fern-fronds nodded with their quiet knowing. Here the sympathy of nature stole upon her, filling her with ecstasy. Warm pulses beat and throbbed within her. Wild, careless happiness beat up and overflowed. And in that hour of ecstatic new health she suddenly felt that she was alone. Out through an opening of the trees she could see again the wide, wide world sloping down by white church

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spire and river-valleys to cities pink and white in the haze—to the city that was her home, the home of her dreaming, and to *him*!

“Oh, Paul, Paul!” she cried, lifting delicious arms to the blue sky as if she thought a young god might come flashing down out of that beautiful sea,—but softly, as though her voice might carry down to the city where he was:

“I want you! Oh, how I want you!”

XVII

THERE remain but two or three more of these small pictures to string on the thread of this rather slender narrative, and they shall be put in place without much sleight-of-hand.

It was in the winter after their marriage, and while the old brick house opposite the oh-so-tiny park was being altered and repaired, that Paul, now jealously insistent on playing the rôle of safety-valve, bore the Princess abroad. The particular night in question they had gone to see a Barrie play—a thing of sentiment and dreams, and of the faery touch—at the Drury Lane theater, and their hostess was a Mrs. Lang-Carmichael, whom they had known intimately in the old Paris days. She was a rigid churchwoman, of a stiff spine and a stiffer temper, and she sat up in black silk and jet very like a duchess beside the modest little Princess. They were watching the arrivals with interest while the orchestra played the overture.

Suddenly a box opposite their own was filled with a gay party of fluttering women and courtly gentle-

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men, in the midst of whom stood a tall figure, not at all handsome, but of a military bearing,—whose skin, like flaky red bricks, had grayed a little, whose sparse, faded red hair was only a little thinner, but who was still the adventurer and the wanderer, domesticated ever so slightly in London.

“The young Earl of Sandford, my dear,” whispered Mrs. Lang-Carmichael behind her fan. “The most astonishing spendthrift—and worse—in England.”

“Are you quite sure?” the Princess inquired softly. “I used to know a man who resembled him very closely—a lieutenant in the army, I think—one Harry Guex.”

“Absolutely!” the lady responded with asperity, and already drawing slightly away in horror from her quiet little guest. “I should hope that you had never known this particular creature. It would have been a shadow on your reputation. Positively—”

But Margarita interrupted her.

“Please don't trouble,” she said. “There may be some little good in him, hidden away beyond our sight, you know.”

On that journey they sought out the one boon companion of George Gresham's schooldays, and found a genial, baldheaded and still youthful bachelor who quite belied the somber name of N. Tertius Blackbourne—possessor of placid coun-

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try estates and lover of a ruddy fireside. Mr. Blackbourne, who entertained them charmingly as long as he could constrain them to remain in his quiet country, did finally promise to "come out." And in the third year of their married life he appeared at the little American farmhouse which they had embowered in flowers as much as might be like an English cottage.

He had hardly gotten his breath before they led him to the nursery—they were so utterly proud and happy. And he, stooping to the dimpled thing of curls and eyes that laughed up at him from the carpet, gathered the child in his arms and intuitively called him "George."

"I've a better picture of your father in my portmanteau, that I've been saving to bring to you," he explained. "But nothing half so beautiful, so like him, as this!" Whereupon he buried his big nose in the baby's neck.

THESE are but external and accidental things, that might happen to anyone. But the third is peculiar to the Princess herself, and it did not come about by chance.

It was night, and rain streamed incessantly on a scene of jet and gold. The oh-so-tiny park was but a thing of soft black shadows, a brocade on the deeper darkness; the smelly pavements were an ebony stream that flashed back gleams and rills of

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men, in the midst of whom stood a tall figure, not at all handsome, but of a military bearing,—whose skin, like flaky red bricks, had grayed a little, whose sparse, faded red hair was only a little thinner, but who was still the adventurer and the wanderer, domesticated ever so slightly in London.

“The young Earl of Sandford, my dear,” whispered Mrs. Lang-Carmichael behind her fan. “The most astonishing spendthrift—and worse—in England.”

“Are you quite sure?” the Princess inquired softly. “I used to know a man who resembled him very closely—a lieutenant in the army, I think—one Harry Guex.”

“Absolutely!” the lady responded with asperity, and already drawing slightly away in horror from her quiet little guest. “I should hope that you had never known this particular creature. It would have been a shadow on your reputation. Positively—”

But Margarita interrupted her.

“Please don't trouble,” she said. “There may be some little good in him, hidden away beyond our sight, you know.”

On that journey they sought out the one boon companion of George Gresham's schooldays, and found a genial, baldheaded and still youthful bachelor who quite belied the somber name of N. Tertius Blackbourne—possessor of placid coun-

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"They sent me here from the Martha Home. I'd never 'a' come, only they sneered when they mentioned it. They're all full up there. They're always full when I go. They only take the good-lookin' ones, the promisin' ones. I guess I ain't promisin'."

"Come *on* in!" said the angular woman, now with some impatience. "You don't want to stand there talking in the rain all night, do ye? No, we ain't quite so sweet as they are up at the Martha Home, but anyhow we don't turn you away. *We're* all full too; but we ain't going to refuse shelter to a poor, helpless thing like you that don't know whether you're coming or going,—not if I have to sleep standing up in the hall myself."

"Oh, dear," the newcomer said forlornly, "I'm gettin' your carpets all dripped."

"Never mind the carpets," Angie Kernochan answered. "We can take care of them any time. It's you we're worrying about just now." As she led the way up-stairs to a large white, warm bathroom, she softened a little.

"You mustn't mind me, dearie," she said, patting the pitiful creature on the shoulders in a motherly kind of way. "I'm just rough and common: I was born that way. Down in the bottom of my heart I ain't any better than them at the Martha Home. I'm just as selfish and just as mean. But there's a little woman runs in here every day or two. She's the real thing. If you was to see her now, coming

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down the hallway, you'd think it was a slant of sunshine strayed in,—just as bright, and sweet, and warm, and just as likely to flee away again before you could believe it. . . . We can't keep her here. She has to live in the country, she's that delicate. . . . But if she'd see you now, she'd be just as likely to put her arm around you,—all wet as you are,—and kiss your dirty face, and love you— Yes, *really* love you! You needn't to look at me that way! . . . And if you wouldn't turn away from your wickedness and be good after that, the *Lord have mercy on you!*—there wouldn't be no hope for you in this world or any other."

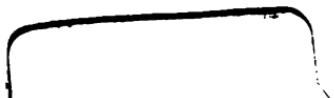
A few moments later she tapped at the door of a small room in the attic.

"Miss Breen," she said, entering, "I ain't got the crust to ask you to move again in the same night. But there is a cot in my room beside the bed and you could have the bed. There's another poor devil drifted in to us out of the night. She's down in the bathroom now getting some dry things on."

And the very gray, very slender, very tired woman who rose from the bed smiled with a wondrous happiness nevertheless, and looked as though she had seen a vision.

THE END











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